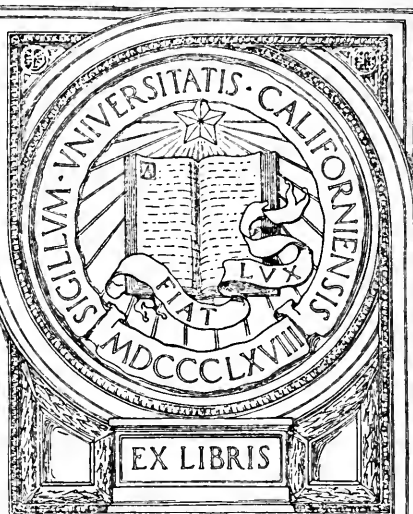


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Dec 1837

E. M. M. -

GRISELDA.

A

DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

FREDERICK HALM

BY

SIR RALPH A. ANSTRUTHER, BART.

LONDON,

BLACK AND ARMSTRONG.

DRESDEN AND LEIPSIC,

CHR. ARNOLD.

1840.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
PRESS

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TO

LOUISA
GRAEFIN HOHENTHAL

GEB. PRINZESSIN BIRON VON CURLAND

THIS TRANSLATION

OF A DRAMA INTENDED TO POURTRAY

THE PERFECTIONS OF THAT SEX

OF WHICH SHE IS HERSELF SO BRIGHT AN ORNAMENT

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY

THE TRANSLATOR.

Dresden March 30th, 1840.

249497

JAN 14 1937

English Dept.

MAY 13 1936

J. W. Robinson



PREFACE.

The following Translation was not undertaken with the slightest idea of publication, or indeed even with the view of ultimate completion, but merely as an exercise in the study of the German language, and as a good means of comparing and impressing on the memory the analogies which exist between that language and our own. The amusement which I derived from the task having, however, led me to complete it, I shall make no apology for presenting it to the Public, and thereby affording such of my countrymen, as may be unable to read the original, an opportunity of forming some idea, however inadequate, of the merits of one of the most popular Dramas which has lately appeared on the German stage, and of which the subject seems, at all times and in all nations, to have created so lively an interest.

The history of the original "Romance of Griselda" is very curious, and, when I mention that it is closely associated with the names of the three great regenerators of European Poetry and Romance — Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer, and is the medium through which we learn, to a certain extent, the intercourse which subsisted among these remarkable men, I cannot allow myself to think that the following sketch will be found unacceptable.

The Tale originally appeared in the "Decamerone" of Boccaccio, and, from its being the last of the series, we may conclude that it was considered by the Author as one of the best. Such at least is the inference drawn by Petrarch, and so great was the impression made by the story on the tender heart of "Laura's lover," that he not only committed it to memory, in order that he might be enabled to narrate it at pleasure to his friends, but also translated it into Latin, that those ignorant of Italian might have an opportunity of enjoying "so sweet a history." This we learn from a Latin letter * written by Petrarch to Boccaccio, extant in the works of the former, and which possesses a double

* quae (historia) ita mihi placuit, ut neque detinuit, ut inter tot curas quae penè mei ipsius immemorem fecère, illam memoriae mandare voluerim, ut et ipse eam animo, quoties vellem, non sine voluptate repeterem, et amicis ut fit confabulantibus, renarrarem, si quando aliquid tale incidisset. Quod cum brevi postmodum fecissem, gratamque audientibus cognovissem, subito talis cogitatio interloquendum supervenit, fieri posse, ut nostri etiam sermonis ignares tam dulcis historia delectaret, cum et mihi semper ante multos annos audita placuisset, et tibi usque adeo placuisse perpenderem, ut vulgari eam stilo tuo censueris non indignam et suae operis, ubi rhetorum disciplina validiora quaelibet collocari jubet. Petr. Epist.

degree of interest from the fact that it was, in all probability, the last that Petrarch ever wrote. It bears the following date and motto: “Valete amici, valete epistolae, inter colles Euganeos VI idus junias 1374,” and he died on the 18th July of the same year. * The letter is prefixed to his translation of *Griselda* which bears the appropriate title: “De obedientia ac fide uxoria *Mythologia*.”

It is related, that on one occasion when Petrarch was reciting the tale to a company in Padua, a gentleman present became so much affected, and burst into such frequent fits of tears that he was unable to read to the end; another, hearing of this, and incredulous as to the possibility of such an effect being produced, read the story aloud in presence of Petrarch without betraying the slightest emotion, but on returning the book to the Poet declared, that he would have been equally affected could he have persuaded himself that the story was true, and that the conviction, that there never was, and never could be, such a wife as *Griselda*, alone enabled him to preserve his composure.

Amidst the many, whom we may suppose to have flocked round the Bard of Arqua to hear his recitation of a tale which he felt so deeply, was our own immortal Chaucer, then employed in Italy on a diplomatic mission; and, as is well observed in a late Biography of that Poet — “to

* Petrarch was found dead in his study, bent over a book; and so softly had the gentle spirit of the Poet taken its departure, that for some time he was supposed to be only asleep.

“picture to ourselves the venerable and immortal Italian
 “reciting to his honoured and admiring guest his just com-
 “pleted version of a tale of woe, almost unparalleled in
 “its power of subduing the human heart, is indeed a scene
 “which might furnish materials for the pencil of the most
 “gifted artist”.* —

Chaucer evinced his admiration of the tale, as Petrarch had done, by translating it; and, as this did not take place till twenty years after he first heard it, the hold which it had taken on his imagination is the more apparent. It is found amongst his “*Canterbury Tales*”,** and is put into the mouth of the “*Clerk of Oxenford*” — an imaginary personage with whom he seems to have identified himself, and in the Prologue he thus alludes to the source whence he derived the story:

I wolle you telle a talè, whiche that I
 Lernid at Padow of a worthie Clerke,
 As preved is by his wordes and by his werke.
 He is now dede, and nailid in his cheste;
 I praye to God to sende his soul gode reste,
 Frauncis Petrarke, the Laureate Poete,
 Hightin this Clerke, whose Rhetorike so swete
 Enluminid Itaile of Poetrie —————

* Lardner's *Cab. Cycl.* vol. 84.

** It seems strange that both Dryden and Miss Edgeworth should have fallen into error respecting the authorship of this tale; the former, in the Preface to his *Fables*, says: “it was the invention of Petrarch, by him sent to Boccace, from whom it came to Chaucer” — and the latter, in her novel of “*The Modern Griselda*”, talks of the heroine of Chaucer's Tale as “the real, original, old *Griselda*.”

Chaucer has followed the original of Boccaccio very closely, preserved its exquisite pathos and simplicity, and lent to it the charms of that verse which, however quaint it may sound to modern ears, can never fail to please while the human heart remains unchanged. If the dry prose of Petrarch written in a dead language (for it is of the translation the story is told) could produce the effects above described, what must have been the emotions excited among his countrymen by the numbers of Chaucer, sung in their own language, and in an age when Novelty lent an additional power to the charms of Poetry.

The Tale of “Griselda” has been, at different periods, translated into most of the modern languages of Europe. It was brought out on the French stage, so early as the year 1393, and I must not omit to mention, that *Father Prout*, in his “Reliques”, * claims for that nation the credit of the original story, and even gives, as such, a Troubadour Ballad in Norman French, entitled: “Griseledis”. The good Father’s love of mystification, his wonderful talent for imitation—which seems to triumph with equal ease over all languages and dialects, ancient or modern, living or dead, foreign or vernacular—added to the suspicious vicinity of his residence to the celebrated “Blarney Stone”, leave me in doubt whether the ballad is genuine; but even if it is so, the coincidence between it and the “Tale” is con-

* The Reliques of Father Prout, London 1836. Vol. 2. pages 71 and 76. These clever papers appeared first in Fraser’s Magazine.

fined to the names of the hero and heroine, and to the fact of a noble Knight having “wedded a maiden of low degree”, which are but secondary matters in Boccaccio’s Novella. In one point, too, the usual accuracy of “his Reverence” is certainly at fault, for we find him writing thus: “This story (Griselda) Petrarch picked up in Provence, as I shall show by and by on producing the original *French ballad*.” The very different quarter where Petrarch did “pick it up” has already been mentioned, and certainly never was the implied charge of plagiarism more undeserved. The French ballad, genuine or not, is so exquisitely simple, and the translation, like every thing else in these papers, so full of talent, that I have added both to the Notes appended to the play.

Boccaccio’s Tale has lately appeared in a collection of German popular stories, entitled „*Volksbücher*“. In our own language an excellent translation is to be found in the 257th No. of Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal, and well do I recollect the pleasure which, as a child, I received from an older English version, given in a collection of Children’s Stories, where the “Patient Griselda” is to be found in such unworthy company as the “White Cat,” “Riquet with the Tuft,” “Fortunatus” etc.

The Author * of the Drama before us has added another fair flower to the bright wreath which encircles

* I believe it is no longer a secret that the name, F. Halm, as given in the Title-page is an assumed one, and that the real author of this drama is the Baron von Münch-Bellinghausen.

this simple but pathetic tale, and proves himself no unworthy successor of the great men who had preceded him. He has in many respects followed the original very closely, tho' of course the necessities of the Drama required the introduction of new matter and new machinery. He has managed this with a skilful and judicious hand, and has filled up the sketch of the early Master without injuring its simplicity, and in a manner which shows his just appreciation of the characters therein pourtrayed. In the catastrophe of the plot, however, he has departed entirely from Boccaccio, whether with advantage or not is questionable. At first sight, we undoubtedly feel pleased that poetical justice has been rendered to the tyrannical and selfish husband, instead of finding him, as in the "Tale", in the enjoyment of unclouded happiness, undisturbed by a single pang of remorse for the greater, more protracted, and even less excusable cruelties which he is there made to perpetrate against his innocent wife; the fair sex too may, perhaps, feel grateful to the Poet for having vindicated the "Patient Grizzle" from the charge of *pusillanimity* usually brought against her. But how fares it, meanwhile, with the heroine herself? In the "Tale", we find her restored to her husband and her children, and reaping, as guerdon of her constancy, a rich harvest of golden opinions; in the "Drama", on the contrary, she is made to return to her humble cottage, and linger out the miserable remnant of her days in the society of a fa-

ther whose character, as there drawn, does not warrant us to conclude that he would soothe her griefs with a very tender hand —— a fate hardly compensated to the reader by the punishment awarded to her oppressor. The *dénouement* in the “Tale” is also more in keeping with the meek and gentle character of Griselda, for, with all the colouring of the Dramatist, it is difficult to divest one’s self of the idea, that her resolution to leave Percival arose, in some measure at least, from wounded pride, a feeling entirely at variance with the other attributes of her disposition. Even for dramatic effect, I am rather inclined to give the preference to the conclusion of the “Tale”; the restoration of the children might have been worked up into an admirable closing scene. We must however admit that the Dramatist has human nature on his side. A discussion on this point has given rise to the idea of a *Continuation* of the Drama, and this has been undertaken in English by my friend Mr. Frankland Evelyn; from the specimens which I have seen, it will be every way worthy of the subject, securing ultimate happiness to all parties, but to the sinning husband only after a suitable expiation of his crime.

The scene of the Drama before us lies in England, in the days of “good King Arthur”, the conduct of whose Queen and Court is made to afford some plea for the barbarous conduct of Griselda’s lord. This is all new but necessary matter, and so skilfully is it dove-tailed on

the old, as to render the difference quite imperceptible, and to form one beautiful and most harmonious whole. I sincerely wish a Translator had been found more able to do justice to its merits, for I am well aware of the many imperfections of the following pages, and how much the original has suffered in consequence. The translation is however, I believe, very literal; I have seldom allowed myself to depart from the close sense of the original, even when, by a little latitude in this respect, the language might have been rendered more harmonious; and the few instances, in which I have not observed this rule, have arisen either from the peculiar genius of the English language, or from the arbitrary rules of national taste.

I cannot conclude these remarks without offering my sincere thanks to my friend Mr. Denham Cooke for his kind and able assistance in revising these pages, and for the valuable suggestions which I have received from him; and without, at the same time, expressing my hope that he will, ere long, allow the Public to benefit by his admirable translations from the Lyrical Poetry of Schiller, Goethe and Herder.

Dresden March 30th. 1840.

After the above remarks were in the Press, I accidentally observed in the "*Allgemeine Zeitung*" an excellent and very favourable Critique on this Drama from the pen of M. Marmier,* followed by an announcement that it had just been translated into the French language and was about to be brought out on that stage. The Note appended to the article by a German critic coincides with many of the ideas which I have expressed above, but I cannot agree with him in classing Shakespeare and Kleist among those who have handled this subject. "*Das Raethchen von Heilbronn*"— the play of the latter to which, I presume, allusion is made— differs totally in conception, treatment, and tendency from the tale of Boccaccio and the drama of Halm; and equally remote is the asserted "relationship" between Griselda and the Helena of Shakespeare's "*All's well that ends well*". We cannot easily imagine our modest heroine, throwing herself with Raethchen out of a window, thirty feet from the ground, in her anxiety to follow the fortunes of a man who had never breathed a syllable of love to her, or busied with Helena in devising stratagems to thrust herself, as wife, upon one who declares :

"He cannot love her nor will strive to do it."

* The able Translator of several of Goethe's Tragedies.



GRISELDA.

*The original was acted for the first time at
Vienna on the 30th. December 1835.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

King Arthur.

Kenneth of Scotland.

Lancelot of the Lake.

Gavin.

Tristram the Wise.

Percival of Wales.

The King's Seneschal.

Ronald, One of Percival's Attendants.

Cedric, a Collier.

A Boy.

Ginevra, Arthur's Queen.

Oriana.

Mercia.

} Ladies of the Court.

Ellinor, Wife of Kenneth.

Griselda, Cedric's Daughter. Wife of Percival.

Knights and Ladies.

Percival's Retainers.

Griselda's Attendants. Servants.

ACT FIRST.

KING ARTHUR'S CASTLE AT CAERLEON.

A richly adorned and brilliantly illuminated hall. In the background, music and the usual decorative accompaniments of a royal festival. In the foreground a throne and canopy.

SCENE FIRST.

Servants and pages in gorgeous liveries hurry across the stage, with golden drinking cups etc. Knights and Ladies in court array move up and down the stage, amongst them King Arthur, Seneschal, Tristram, Percival. (King Arthur comes forward with Seneschal).

ARTHUR.

I am well satisfied, brave Seneschal.
Thou steal'st from Night the glitter of her stars,
From Ocean's bed the pearline's silver sheen,
From the Earth's womb the bright carbuncle's ray,
To deck with brilliancy our festival.
Thou hast not left a wish ungratified.

SENESCHAL.

Less pomp, my Liege, I thought would ill beseem
The royal host and his illustrious guests —
'The very pith and flower of the kingdom.

For see! there fails not one of all thy knights :
 E'en Wales's rugged son, Sir Percival,
 Has left his forest depths at thy command,
 And clad in jerkin rude of buffalo —
 A shaggy bear-skin o'er his shoulders thrown —
 He struts within the precincts of the palace.

ARTHUR.

Heed not his garb, for scars are his adornment,
 And round him, star-like, shines a warrior's glory.
 Three years he has been absent from our court,
 And welcome is he tho' in bear-skin clad. —
 But now away! our guests do tarry for us.
 Hasten the menial's step, and never let
 The sigh of Music's melody expire,
 Nor Thirst descry the golden goblet's depths.
 Till morrow's dawn must last our revelry.

SENECHAL.

Rest satisfied, my Liege, these festive halls
 Shall not before the morning be deserted.

*(Arthur and Seneschal retire among the guests, while Percival
 and Tristram step forward.)*

PERCIVAL.

Know you yon dame, who hangs on Kenneth's arm,
 Who sweeps the pavement with her velvet robes,
 The gilded ceiling with her heron plumes?

TRISTRAM.

'Tis Ellinor, Sir Kenneth's wedded dame,
 From ancient Fingal's royal stock descended;
 And absolute as Fingal Erin ruled,
 She sways the sceptre in Sir Kenneth's halls.

PERCIVAL.

And he, poor ninny, is content to bear it? —
 Then let him change the doublet for a petticoat! —
 And yonder dame with magic wand and girdle,
 Who, strange and silent 'mid the waving throng,
 In gloomy musing broods — say, who is she?

TRISTRAM.

It is Morgiana, sister to the King,
 For her deep insight into hidden lore,
 Surnamed the very wonder of the world.
 'Tis said, she studies deep the art of Magic.

PERCIVAL.

Better she studied deep the art of *Cooking*! —
 I ask for blind obedience in a woman,
 And mute submission to the man's decree;
 Wisdom, like strength, is *our* inheritance,
 And but a plaything in a woman's hand.

TRISTRAM.

A plaything, Percival?

PERCIVAL.

Yes, Tristram, yes!

Would you the woman to the life depict
 As formed for man she left her Maker's hands,
 Place her before a spinning wheel, direct
 Her eyes devout to Heaven's azure vault,
 And lay an infant to her swelling breast.
 Beyond this, all is superfluity. —
 How goes the time?

TRISTRAM.

Near midnight, Percival.

PERCIVAL.

I'm wearied o' this feast, would it were over!

TRISTRAM.

What! have the glitter of this festive hall,
 The buzzing crowd of merry revellers,
 The perfumed air, soft Music's siren song,
 No charms for you? — And can you joyless bask
 In the meridian ray of royal splendour?

PERCIVAL.

I can, Sir Knight, for yonder at Pendennys,
 In my own castle, glitter halls as bright.
 The bidden guests come blythe at my desire,
 And while they gape with wonder at my wealth
 Pay me their court. Why should I tarry here,
 Bow the stiff back and bend the stubborn knee,
 While royal honours wait me at my home?

TRISTRAM.

I well perceive, Sir Percival, that you
Do long to join your child and faithful lady.

PERCIVAL.

What say you? How?

TRISTRAM.

I mean, you would you sat
By wife and child within Pendennys' halls!

PERCIVAL.

How! Slew I not Cadmòr and Swaine of Denmark?
And has not Fame the name of Percival
To ev'ry corner of the Island spread,
Where by acclaim they call me Giant-killer?

TRISTRAM.

In truth, they call you so.

PERCIVAL.

And yet, Sir Tristram,
You think I am become a woman's slave,
Who flaps the flies from off his infant's cradle,
And plays, for its amusement, the Buffoon! —
By holy David, Sir! I took a wife,
Not by a wife was taken.

TRISTRAM.

Tell me then,

Why fold you thus your forehead into wrinkles,
And draw your brows like thunder clouds together?

PERCIVAL.

I know not, Tristram, why it should be so. —
Methinks my very happiness grows irksome.
The dull routine of these my honied days —
Creates a yearning after bitterness,
And as the pampered palate longs for spices,
I seek for charms my dulness to dispel.

TRISTRAM.

Ah! Percival, you know not what you wish.

PERCIVAL.

It may be so, but still the wish remains. —
In Wales there is a stream we name the Trent,
Which, springing from a lofty mountain source,
In sparkling gladness rushes through the land.
As long as (pr'ythee mark) its foaming flood
With toilsome effort struggles through the glen,
Bounds o'er the rock, through mountain barrier breaks,
And frets and rages 'gainst the opposing mole,
So long it clear as liquid crystal flows,
In youthful force and vigour unimpaired;
Its tide is bright with gold, and sprightly plays
The trout, disporting in its cooling depths.
But when it leaves its mountain mother's lap,
And, wand'ring wide through meadows unconfined.

It seeks the distant ocean to attain,
 Then creeps it slow along a marshy bed
 In silent sadness, owns the bridge's yoke,
 Obeys the rudder or the mill-wheel drives,
 And genders toads and paddocks in its slime.

TRISTRAM.

You mean, Sir Knight —

PERCIVAL.

Yes, by my oath! I mean,
 I feel a close affinity with Trent.
 I was not born, in sluggish indolence
 To drive the wheel-work of domestic life.
 E'en were my wife more blessed with truth and virtue —
 And credit me she true and virtuous is —
 But grew there angels' wings upon her shoulders,
 My soul seeks more than wife or child can fill. —
 And now, Sir Tristram, yet a parting cup,
 Then must I home!

TRISTRAM.

So early, Percival?

PERCIVAL.

I go, at latest ere to-morrow dawns.

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE SECOND.

Sprightly music is heard in the back-ground. Ginevra advances, heated by dancing, and attended by Lancelot. They are followed at some little distance by Oriana, Mercia, Gavin etc. In the back-ground Kenneth and Ellinor.

LANCELOT. *

Ginevra, vex me not, thou driv'st me mad!
 As sunbeams wither up the verdant mead,
 Thy glance inflames my very brain with frenzy,
 And blights with arid heat my ev'ry thought.
 Oh! who can bear with thy inconstancy?
 Thy smiles deceive us and thy tears betray
 Thy scorn is kindness and thy favour hate —
 Who has e'er solved the riddle of thy nature?
 Didst thou but know the treasury of love
 My bosom hides!

GINEVRA.

Speak lower, Lancelot!

GAVIN

(in conversation with Mercia.)

Now by those eyes of starry brightness, say
 Dost hate me?

MERCIA.

Ah no! **

GAVIN.

Then must thou love me?

* Vid. Note 1.

** Vid. Note 2.

MERCIA.

Ah no!

GAVIN.

Hast thou no kinder word for me?
Speaks never in thy bosom's depths a wish —
A sweet mysterious longing undefined?

MERCIA.

Ah yes!

GAVIN.

Then give it sound and utterance.
Speak, Mercia, speak, unfold thy inmost soul.

MERCIA.

I fain would marry, Sir.

GAVIN

(aside.)

Ye powers of Heaven!

How open-hearted are these ladies fair!

GINEVRA

(who meanwhile has been talking in under tones, but earnestly, with Lancelot.)

You cannot dupe me, Sir! The sweet illusions,
Which transient dreams before our senses spread,
Melt into air with morning's early breath.
In hate, but not in love, is found sincerity!,

LANCELOT.

A pall thou throwest o'er the joys of life,

And blightest all the May-bloom of the heart,
Coldly disowning thus the power of love!

*(He continues speaking in an under tone with the Queen, while
Ellinor and Kenneth advance.)*

ELLINOR.

Think not to blind me, Kenneth, but confess,
What said you to Morgiana, when apart
You talked within the window's deep recess?

KENNETH.

I, Ellinor?

ELLINOR.

Yes, you! Would you deny it?

KENNETH.

Deny it? No! I have no cause to do so.
She prated of the mysteries of Magic,
The planets' changes and the course of stars,
Till she wore out my patience and her subject.
Would to some fav'rite star she'd wing her flight!

ELLINOR.

Unworthy one! So—with this nursery-tale —
This bald unvarnished falsehood you'd deceive me?
A day of reck'ning waits for you at home!

GAVIN.

What ails you, Kenneth? Speak, you are unwell.
You shake as if you suffered from the ague.

KENNETH.

Oh, nothing! a mere buzzing in the ear!

GINEVRA

(to Lancelot.)

No more, Sir Lancelot! For poison sleeps,
Death broods amid the honey of thy words,
I'll hear no more. — I'm faint with weariness
And fain would rest awhile.

LANCELOT.

My Sovereign!

Behold a throne with sumptuous care adorned,
Worthy the Queen of Beauty to receive.

(He leads her to the throne, round which the Courtiers group themselves, and is about to retire.)

GINEVRA.

Nay! Turn thee not away, Sir Lancelot,
My Knight thou art, so place thee at my feet. —
Now, noble dames and valiant warriors,
Approach, I pray, and season this our hour
Of rest with gay and sprightly conversation;
And first inform me, if perchance you know
The Knight, who yonder 'gainst the beaufet leans,
With sunburnt brow, and locks of raven hue.

ORIANA

(with vivacity.)

Mean you Sir Walladmor, who Mercury
Between his mistress and his rival played? —

Or yonder slim youth Lionel mayhap,
 Who chained his spring to ancient Signé's winter,
 And blindly worships still her withered charms?

GINEVRA.

Neither I mean.

ORIANA.

Is it then Ethelric,
 Who seven years his court to Mildred paid,
 Till in the eighth she married Westmoreland?—
 Close at his side there sits Sir Joscelyn,
 Who reckons up how many roods of land
 His little dame exhibits in her head-gear.—
 Beyond him stands—

GINEVRA.

That's he, thou prattling Mischief!
 Beyond him stands a Knight in bear-skin clad,
 Whose plain attire our festive splendour mocks.

ORIANA.

That is Sir Percival, my Sovereign!
 Sirnamed throughout the land the Giant-killer.

GAVIN

(to *Ginevra*.)

Know you not, Queen, the man so highly famed?

GINEVRA.

His name I long have known, but not his features.

ORIANA.

How should you know him, gracious Sovereign?
Three years he now has shunned his monarch's court,
And deep in forest gloom has lived immured,
Since first he led a help-mate to his home.

KENNETH.

A help-mate?—

LANCELOT.

How! Sir Percival is married?—
Who, prouder still than mighty and renowned,
Found none in Arthur's court he worthy deemed
To be his bride?

ORIANA.

The very man, the same.

ELLINOR.

What! He who thought e'en royal blood too poor,
To mingle with the current of his own?

ORIANA.

The same, the very same Sir Percival.

GINEVRA.

From whence then is the chosen one descended?

ORIANA.

Her name and race have not as yet been bruited
Beyond the mountain barriers of Wales.

GINEVRA.

Sir Percival approaches, shall I ask him? "

ORIANA.

Oh! do so, Queen, if I may proffer counsel.

SCENE THIRD.

Enter Percival and Tristram.

PERCIVAL.

Never, by Heav'n! did wine of gentler fire
And flavour more delicious pass my throat!
My features glow, my pulses madly race,
And hov'ring o'er the threshold of my lips
Is ev'ry secret of my inmost soul.—
But why remain amid these parasites,
Who stately strut, bedecked in gay apparel,
And strive with well turned phrase for eminence?
Methinks I will away!—

TRISTRAM.

What! Percival,
While gloomy darkness broods o'er ev'ry valley?—
Why hence depart before the morning breaks?

GINEVRA.

Sir Percival!

PERCIVAL.

Who calls?

TRISTRAM.

It is the Queen —
 Ginevra — she invites you to approach her.

GINEVRA.

Sir Percival, we would that you instruct us,
 Who vanquished you, so long invincible.

PERCIVAL.

What mean you, gracious Lady?

GINEVRA.

You are married!

PERCIVAL.

Who said so?

GINEVRA.

Are you not?

PERCIVAL.

Most true — I am! —

Think you I blush to own it? — That I would
 Deny Griselda, my belovéd? — No! —
 A fairer creature ne'er adorned this earth,
 Yet beauty is the poorest of her charms,
 For she is pious, lowly as the violet,
 Meek as a lamb, and full of truth and kindness —
 Simple, sincere, yet rich in Reason's gifts.
 Full many of her sex I've seen, a better
 Never.* — What though she spring from collier's** loins,
 Nor boasts patrician blood within her veins!

* Vid. Note 3. ** Vid. Note 4.

GINEVRA

(aside to her Courtiers, who follow in the same tone.)

Is't possible?

ORIANA.

Most strange!

GAVIN.

A collier's daughter?

ELLINOR.

All sense forsakes me! Dire atrocity,
Thus to profane a proud and ancient race!

GINEVRA.

Sir Gavin, follow Percival's example,
And doff the character of womanhater.

GAVIN.

E'en did I hate, I soon should learn to love.
Still, I go armed by past experience,
And marriage is a serious affair.
Is't not so, Mercia?

MERCIA.

Ah yes! *

GAVIN.

At least
You would not wed a black and sooty collier?

MERCIA.

Ah no!

* Vid. Note 2.

PERCIVAL

(*to Tristram.*)

What means this mystery, Sir Tristram?
Why do they smile and whisper thus together?
St. David! Mean they me?

TRISTRAM.

Oh, Percival!

'Tis only woman's way, do they not make
Of ev'ry trifle an important myst'ry?
Let them alone, what matters it to thee?

GINEVRA

(*to her Courtiers.*)

You wish it? Well, I can but make the trial. —
Sir Percival, consider our misfortune
Ne'er to have seen this pattern of our sex,
And give Griselda to our longing eyes.
Have you forbid her presence at the court?

PERCIVAL.

Her wish, not my command, keeps her away —
She bides at home, and tends her infant boy.*

GINEVRA.

Oh! tender evidence of mother's love,
Which gives the crowning finish to her virtues! —
Since, then, we 're fated to bewail her absence,
Inform us by what happy stroke of fortune
So rich a treasure fell into your hands.

* Vid. Note 5.

PERCIVAL.

If, sovereign Lady, you desire to hear
 The tale, I blush not truly to relate it.
 A blush would cast a doubt upon my freedom!

GINEVRA.

Begin, Sir Percival!

PERCIVAL.

My noble Lady,
 'Tis now some three years gone, since all my vassals
 With urgent pray'r entreated me to marry,
 And thus continue in the line direct
 My father's honours and inheritance. *
 But I had here — e'en in this kingly court —
 Full many a fold of woman's heart explored,
 I found her knavish, false and hypocritical,
 Impatient of controul, replete with malice
 And vanity, yet weak and unconfiding,
 Abusing recklessly her husband's trust,
 To give unbridled license to her passions.
 And, deeming none deserving of my choice,
 I lost all relish and desire to marry.
 Nor do I now repent me that it was so.

ELLINOR

(*aside.*)

His speech is ruder than his leather jerkin!

ORIANA.

The insolent!

* Vid. Note 6.

GINEVRA.

He shall atone for this !

(*To Lancelot, who steps indignantly forward.*)

No further, Lancelot! — Proceed, I pray,
Sir Knight!

PERCIVAL.

'Twas on a summer's eve, the chase
Had led me far amid the forest glades;
In gloomy mood, at variance with myself—
The sullen breast by stormy thoughts disturbed—
I sauntered forward, unobserved of all,
Until I found my loit'ring, errant steps
Arrested by the waters of a brook,
Whose silver wave the forest here refreshed. —
I looked around, and lo, my Sovereign!
A maid I saw of more than earthly beauty,
Yet one who seemed unconscious of her charms,
A maid—on whose fair brow there stood impressed
In golden characters of star-like brightness,
That, when from God's creative hand she came,
He smiled benignant, and pronounced her—perfect!—
This maiden, Madam—now my wedded wife—
Stood, gaily musing, on the streamlet's brink.

GINEVRA

(*aside to her Courtiers.*)

Think ye, she was about to take a bath
To cleanse the stains her father's trade had left?

ORIANA.

Not so, my Sovereign! Lest the limpid wave

Her brow's inscription might obliterate —
 The seal her Maker set to her perfections.
 She dare not venture it.

PERCIVAL

(*to Tristram.*)

Why sneer they so,
 And look askant at us with scornful eye?
 St. David! Tristram, do they dare to mock me?

TRISTRAM.

How quick you are to form the worst conclusion!
 Let them enjoy their stale insipid humour,
 They touch not you!

PERCIVAL.

A plague o' woman's tongue!

GINEVRA

(*aside.*)

Restrain your satire and compose your mien,
 Lest, haply, you curtail our pleasant pastime.
 Sir Percival, proceed!

PERCIVAL.

What would I say? —

Aye! by the brink she stood; — around her neck
 In wavy ringlets flowed her jetty locks,
 And a tame dove, with folded wings, was perched
 In sweet security upon her shoulder.
 Now stooped the maid, and dipped her tiny feet
 In the bright waters of the crystal brook,

Carefully hiding with her garment's border,
 Whate'er the limpid stream left unconcealed.
 Screened by the shady foliage this I marked,
 And well could prize her native modesty.
 And, as she sat and gazed into the water,
 Which played in murmurs round her feet of snow,
 She followed not the practice of her sex —
 Who smile, then grow enamoured of their shadow,
 And use the brook's reflection as a mirror
 To braid the hair or deck the gay attire —
 But evermore with child-like mimicry
 Amused herself, exulting loud, whene'er
 The stream reflected her distorted charms.
 Then spake in me a voice: "The maiden too
 "Is free from vanity!"

KENNETH.

The tender child!

ELLINOR.

Why heed the collier's brat? By Heaven! Sir
 If I but thought that she were known to you!

-PERCIVAL.

And now some distant spire, embosomed deep
 In mountains, chimed the Vesper hour of pray'r. —
 Earnest and still she grew, shook hastily
 Her thickly clustered tresses from her face,
 And, as she thoughtful turned her angel look
 Upon the deep empurpled clouds of evening,
 Her lips in gentle murmurs seemed to move,
 Like rose leaves flutt'ring in the breath of Heav'n.

"Oh, she is pious!" spoke my inmost soul. —
 She meanwhile crossed her brow, and raised her face
 Tinged with eve's blush and bright devotion's glow,
 While holy fervour veiled her moistened eyes. —
 And now her dove she to her bosom took,
 Caressed it fondly, kissed its snowy plumage,
 Smiling, when eagerly with rosy bill
 'Twould test the tempting freshness of her lips. —
 "How dearly would she cherish it," I thought,
 "Were it a babe, the offspring of her love!" —
 A voice now loud resounded through the forest,
 "Griselda!" said it, "come, Griselda, come!" —
 Soon as the distant accents met her ear,
 She rose, scarce wiped the moisture from her feet,
 And, by her dove attended, swift she sped
 Like light'ning, o'er the dewy turf, and soon
 Her robe's last flutter vanished in the thicket.
 "She is obedient too!" I said; and, lost
 In diverse musings, bent my steps tow'rds home.

GINEVRA.

By Heaven! you narrate so wondrous well,
 So warm, so true to life, that we behold
 The airy sounds embodied into form.
 Methinks I have the darling child before me,
 As by the brook she mimic faces made,
 Such pretty faces too, despite her soot!
 Were they not, Percival?

ORIANA

(aside to the Queen.)

I pr'ythee look !

My Sov'reign, see, how swells his ev'ry vein !
How glows the fiery scarlet on his cheek !

GINEVRA

(to Oriana.)

No matter ! He shall rue his leather jerkin !

PERCIVAL

(to Tristram.)

Would with a glance that I could poison them !
My gall is bursting, and my hate consumes me.

TRISTRAM.

Be calm, heed not their tongues, Sir Percival,
Nor counsel take from overheated blood.

GINEVRA.

And now, good Percival, pray let us hear
The sequel of your tale, and how at last
You led the tender maiden home as bride.

PERCIVAL

(aside.)

I bide my time, and come it must and shall ! —

(To the Queen.)

I summoned on the morrow to my castle *
My numerous retainers, and, arrayed
In festive garb and mounted on my charger,
I sallied forth to greet, with waving banners
And with loud trumpet clang, the shady grove —

* Vid. Note 7.

The verdant cradle of Griselda's charms.
 My vassals halted at her cottage door,
 And I alone the humble threshold crossed.—
 There sat she by her aged parents' side,
 With open brow and clear untroubled eye;
 Her poor blind father fondly stroked her cheek,
 Her aged mother with her ringlets played;
 Full well I saw their daughter was their all. —
 And now with quick resolve I stood before her,
 "Griselda," said I to her, "canst thou love me?" —
 She cast on me a close and searching glance,
 And, deeply blushing, gently bowed her head.
 Again I asked her: "Wilt thou, fair Griselda,
 "Thy parents leave and mine alone become?"
 She murmured soft assent*; while I resumed:
 "Wilt thou obedience to me yield and truth
 "As to thine only Lord?" She answered: "yes!" —
 A kiss I then imprinted on her lips,
 The aged couple blessed their darling child,
 And forth I bore her in my stalwart arms
 To where my vassals tarried my return.
 "Behold, my friends," I cried, "my chosen bride!" —
 Anon, the trumpets sounded, and the voice
 Of joy was heard throughout — I led her home,
 Where priestly blessing bound the holy tie. —
 In this wise, Queen Ginevra, was I married! —

GINEVRA.

Accept our greetings! May your marriage torch
 With *live-coal* brightness never cease to burn!

* Vid. Note 8.

ELLINOR.

If I may dare to ask, Sir Percival,
How many *ton of coal* did your dear wife
As marriage portion bring?

ORIANA.

She brought him nothing,
Except the dowry of a tender heart,
And this her glowing love had burnt to *cinders*.

ELLINOR.

Take my advice, my good Sir Percival,
Emblazon, in remembrance of your choice,
A *poker proper* in your shield's escutcheon.

GINEVRA.

And tell me further, does your worthy dame
Amuse you ever with her old grimaces? —
It must become her well! — A truce to jesting!
Sir Percival, farewell! I pray you, give
The collier's daughter Queen Ginevra's greeting!
(*She is about to retire.*)

PERCIVAL

(*losing all command of himself.*)

The dagger, poison, leprosy and plague
Were sweeter greeting than thy hateful name!

TRISTRAM.

You are beside yourself, Sir Percival.

LANCELOT.

This calls for blood!

PERCIVAL.

And blood shall soon be shed!

(Both draw.)

GINEVRA.

I faint!

(She leans on Oriana for support, Tristram and other Knights step between Percival and Lancelot.)

TRISTRAM.

Part them!

GAVIN.

Hold! Hold! Put up your weapons!

PERCIVAL.

Back!

SCENE FOURTH.

Enter Seneschal, ushering in the King.

SENESCHAL.

Place! my noble Sirs, and keep the peace!
This is the royal palace! Back, my Lords!

PERCIVAL.

Back! agéd fool with thy white rod of office! —
Come on, Sir Lancelot!

KING ARTHUR

(who has in the mean time entered, seizing Percival's arm.)

I command thee, hold!

(The music ceases, the guests come forward, in amazement, from the back part of the stage.)

Why mar ye thus our gay festivities? —
 Ye drown the very music's melody
 In shouts of war and frightful din of arms! —
 Say, Lancelot, how was it? — Percival,
 Speak, I command thee.

PERCIVAL.

Ask Ginevra yonder!

GINEVRA.

My Lord and King! His haughty insolence,
 Despite the sacred precincts where we stand,
 Has done me grievous inj'ry — me, thy Queen —
 Within thy very palace!

ARTHUR.

Say'st thou so?

ORIANA.

Sire, 'tis most true. In this wise fell it out;
 A few light words of harmless banter roused
 Sir Percival to anger, and drew from him
 Insulting language tow'rds our gracious Queen;
 And thence arose the strife, now waxed so warm.

ARTHUR.

Does she say truly? Speak, Sir Percival.!

PERCIVAL.

'Tis true, I used no very courtly language;
 But they had goaded me with taunting jeers —

Held up my spouse's origin to scorn —
 Insulting thus the mother of my child,
 And wounding ev'ry feeling of my heart
 With shallow-wit and bitter mockery. —
 Therefore I spoke, and so again provoked,
 By my blessed father's beard! I'd do't again.

ARTHUR.

Thou hast these sacred precincts desecrated,
 Insulted, in the person of our Queen,
 Thy King and Liege-lord, and, with thy rude breath,
 Hast dimmed the brightness of our royal throne.

PERCIVAL.

St. David, Sir! why slandered she my wife?—
 What though she be an humble peasant's daughter,
 Born in the forest's deep recesses! Still,
 She's chaste and true, and full of tender love,
 And blessed with richer virtues of the soul,
 Than e'en the best amongst her sex can boast.—
 Aye! High-born dames, there is not one amongst ye,
 E'en were you cut from costlier material,
 Or in still gaudier apparel decked—
 There is not one, who with the collier's daughter
 Will bear compare! No, by my troth, not one!

ORIANA.

Audacious! You abase the Queen!

TRISTRAM.

Be calm,
 Nor further heap the overflowing measure.

PERCIVAL

(to the Queen, who can with difficulty suppress her rage.)

Why frown'st thou, Queen? — I tremble not before
The gleaming arrows of thy tyrant glance.
Not I! — And here 'fore all, I plainly tell thee,
Went it on earth by virtue and desert,
She, whom thou scorn'st, would be thy Sovereign,
And thou, Ginevra, kneel before Griselda!

GINEVRA

(to the King.)

Canst thou in silence hear me thus insulted,
And must I bear it from him? —

ARTHUR.

Peace, Ginevra! —

No more, Sir Percival! — Now, by my crown!
On both sides seems the wrong so nicely balanced,
That neither has a right to claim atonement.
But something's due to injured Majesty,
And to the desecration of my palace;
For this, Sir Knight, I must impose a penance,
Yet mild and gracious shall thy sentence be. —
Retract thy words — and all shall be forgiven.

PERCIVAL.

Retract! — No, never!

ARTHUR.

By my oath, thou shalt!

PERCIVAL.

By mine! The Heavens yonder first shall fall!

GINEVRA

(after a few moments consideration.)

Grant me one word, my Lord and Sovereign. —

Let her, who tied the knot, unravel it.

Sir Percival shall *not* his words retract,

And I will kneel before the collier's daughter!

PERCIVAL.

What say you?

LANCELOT.

Strange!

ELLINOR.

Her senses surely wander!

ARTHUR.

You do but jest, Ginevra!

GINEVRA.

Hear me out. —

I kneel, Sir Knight, before the collier's daughter,

If you can proof undoubted bring, that she

In love and truth and prudence is so rich —

So dutiful to you and your behests —

That, if it went on earth by right of merit,

The crown of England should adorn her brows. —

Prove you but this, and I will kneel before her!

PERCIVAL.

You will?

GINEVRA.

I will!

ARTHUR.

Would you, Sir Percival,
Abide the issue of a doubtful contest,
When a few words of penitence suffice?

PERCIVAL

(suddenly.)

What, Lady, are the proofs, which you require?

GINEVRA.

First, I require that you demand from her
Her child, on the pretext, that he must be
Delivered to your Liege-lord, who denies
His sanction to your marriage and its fruits,
And menaces with exile your refusal.

PERCIVAL.

She loves her child—aye, with her soul she loves it!—
But loves her husband better, and for him
Will give her child.— Then to retract my words!—
And further, Queen?

GINEVRA.

Further I will that you
In open Court, in presence of your vassals,
Repudiate your wife, and send her hence,

Helpless and poor, in humble garb arrayed, *
As when she first your castle threshold crossed.

PERCIVAL.

And further, Queen!

GINEVRA.

Further, Sir Percival,
Deep as you thus may wound Griselda's soul,
Her bosom all its kindness must retain;
Her glowing love shall not to hatred turn,
Her tender patience into bitterness;
Aye! closer even must she cling to thee
In mis'ry, than she did in bride's embrace.

PERCIVAL.

And then?

GINEVRA.

Then kneels Ginevra to Griselda!—
But if she come not from this fiery trial
As pure as gold refined, Sir Percival,
Then must you kneel at Queen Ginevra's feet.

PERCIVAL.

Sooner earth's distant poles shall kiss each other.

ARTHUR.

Rescind your proud resolve, Sir Percival.
Acknowledgement of wrong brings no dishonour
Nor wounds so deeply as this racking trial.

GINEVRA.

Why tarry you? Decide, Sir Percival!

* Vid. Note 9.

PERCIVAL.

You think, mayhap, that I would shun the venture! —
 As well I know, Griselda will abide
 The arduous proof, as if it now were over! —
 Listen! — Her father once, Cedric by name,
 An humble collier, blind, advanced in years,
 Yet rough, unbending, crabbed in his nature —
 Dared to oppose my pow'r and lordly right;
 Enraged, I drove him forth beyond my threshold,
 To teach his humour the respect he owed me.
 Griselda, Lady, wept—but wept in silence.
 Would you still further proof? — 'Tis scarce a year,
 That at the brink of death I wounded lay,
 Her mother too had fallen ill, and longed
 To bless her child, before death closed her eyes;
 Griselda's grief was inconsolable,
 Yet stirred she not a foot's breadth from my couch
 Till I recovered, and her aged mother
 Had meanwhile died, nor saw her daughter more!
 And shall I now a moment hesitate? —
 I do accept the challenge, Queen Ginevra;
 I am her All, and victory is mine!

ORIANA.

First win the day — *then* boast your victory!

TRISTRAM.

Deeds have already proved Griselda's love!
 Let not delusion, Percival, pervert
 Your better judgment.

PERCIVAL

(in an under tone.)

'True! profoundest grief
 And anguish most acute will pierce her soul,
 When first she treads the thorny path of trial;
 But 'tis for *me* the task she executes,
 And she shall testify what Love can do. —
 Lady, you will that deeds decide between us.
 Then let it be so! Let them so decide!

ARTHUR.

What, you consent?

TRISTRAM.

Unhappy man, away!

ARTHUR.

Weigh well what you decide, Sir Percival.
 To save yourself one drop of bitterness,
 You reach the brimful chalice to Griselda! —
 Heed not the evil promptings of the moment,
 We freely grant you time for more reflection.

PERCIVAL.

My knightly word, once pledged, holds good for ever!

GINEVRA.

'Tis well! — Two knights, selected by the King,
 Shall straight escort you to Pendennys castle,
 That your Griselda's virtue and her worth,
 Ta'en unawares, may shine the brighter forth.
 Nor shall the trial to a close be brought,
 Nor these mysterious riddles be explained,

Till I myself remove the veil obscure.
 Promise you this?

PERCIVAL.

I promise all you ask!

ARTHUR.

Then be it as you will, Sir Percival!
 Gavin and Tristram shall attend you home!
 Depart in peace!

PERCIVAL.

Farewell, my Sovereign! —
 The Court is up! To horse, to horse, companions!
 The morning breaks, and with the stars of ev'ning
 Pendennys' friendly halls must give us shelter.
(Exit with Gavin and Tristram.)

ARTHUR.

Come, my Ginevra, let us close these revels,
 Which hate and ranc'rous discord have embittered;
 But speed ye with the morrow to Pendennys,
 And straightway end this juggling mystery;
 Me too the chase conducts to yonder valleys —
 Would I could hope to find you reconciled!
 Love should not penance do for Pride's misdeeds!

GINEVRA

(aside to Oriana.)

E'en at my very feet the man shall kneel!

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT SECOND.

PENDENNYS CASTLE.

*Night. A Gothic chamber with carved wainscoting, dimly light-
ed by a single lamp. In the back-ground of the stage, the prin-
cipal entrance; to the left, a small side door.*

SCENE FIRST.

Griselda enters from the side door.

GRISELDA.

Where lingers he?— The night grows dark apace,
In a grey veil of clouds the waning moon
Conceals her pallid face, while vapours damp
And noxious rise from 'Trent.— Where lingers he?—
What if some evil chance retard his coming!—
But hush!— I hear a noise within the hall—
The portal creaks— 'tis he!—

(Enter Ronald by the large door at the back of the stage.)

Thou 'rt welcome, Ronald,
I had expected thee ere now!

RONALD.

My Lady,
The night is so terrific, and the clouds
Roll o'er the sky in such a darkened mass,

That scarce my straining eye the path could trace,
And sore impeded was my homeward progress.

GRISELDA.

What tidings bring'st thou? — Hast thou seen my father?
My agéd, blind, but ever honoured father?

RONALD.

I saw him, Lady, near his cottage door,
Where rears the ancient oak his noble crest
From out the verdant sea of humbler foliage;
He lay reclined upon a mossy couch,
And by him stood the little boy, his guide.

GRISELDA.

Spak'st thou with him? — And have thy words of peace
Transformed his anger 'gainst me into love?

RONALD.

Lady, thou know'st thy father well thyself,
Lightly provoked, but hard to reconcile.
With serious mildness he received my greeting —
For friendly has he ever been to me —
But when to him the message I announced,
Which thy lips, Lady, had to mine entrusted,
Then knitted he his brows in folds together,
A dark and angry cloud obscured his visage,
And, with a bitter smile upon his lips,
He said: “Go tell the wife of Percival, —
“Never again the collier's foot shall cross
“The threshold of her lordly home, no more

“Her roof give shelter to *his* head, who was
 “By Pride expelled a daughter’s arms, and bowed
 “Down to the grave by her ingratitude.”

GRISELDA.

So then ’twas I, his child, who drove him forth? —
 No! ’twas Sir Percival — *my* Lord and *his*;
 And *he* was scarcee himself — in a dark moment,
 The passing feeling of excited anger
 Tore from unguarded lips the rash command.

RONALD.

All this I said to him, but he, my Lady,
 His rude and angry language still continued.
 “’Twas done at least,” he said, “with her consent,
 “She saw her Sire cast forth, and shed mayhap
 “A tear, but found no word of intercession!”

GRISELDA.

And what, oh Heav’n! did I dare oppose
 Against my husband’s wrath, but silent tears?
 Submission can alone appease his anger;
 I bowed to what I saw inevitable,
 But God above was witness of my anguish.

RONALD.

All this I said to him, but darker still
 The clouds of anger thickened on his brow,
 While thus he spake: “Much, much would I forgive,
 “But never *this* — that, when her agéd mother
 “Longed for her child to close her dying eyes,

“That child permitted her to long in vain,
 “Nor came her latest blessing to receive. —
 “The mother died and saw her child no more!”

GRISELDA.

Lay not Death's hand as heavy on my husband
 As on my mother? — Could I think to leave him,
 And heartless trust him to a stranger's care? —
 What my soul suffered in those bitter days,
I only know; — my agonizing fears,
 The struggles of my filial affection,
 With my deep love and duty tow'rd's my husband,
He saw alone, who counts our ev'ry tear!

RONALD.

All this I said to him, but he — but he —

GRISELDA.

Speak, Ronald, say, what wouldst thou hide from me?

RONALD.

Madam, methinks 'twere better to be silent;
 'Twas bitter language which thy father used,
 And touched thee deeply.

GRISELDA.

Still conceal it not!

RONALD.

Then thus he spake — his face with rage distorted
 And ev'ry feature bright with anger's glow —

"Cursed be the jingle of a lofty name!
 "And cursed the vain parade and pomp of rank!
 "For they have stol'n my child!— Their tinsel glare,
 "The pride of riches and authority
 "Taught her to scorn the cottage of her birth,
 "And slight the dying blessing of a mother." —
 And speaking thus, he hastily arose,
 Seized the boy's arm, and, beck'ning me away,
 He soon amidst the forest gloom was lost.

GRISELDA.

No! — This indeed lies light upon my soul!
 'Twas not vain show and tinsel glare, but *love*,
 Which bound my fate to that of Percival.
 The mine of love within his heart concealed —
 This was the jewel — this the precious gold,
 For which I yielded him my inmost soul;
 The pearl-like brightness of his swimming eye —
 And not the empty glare of pomp and power! —
 Is such love guilty — then I own my crime!
 For love, I sacrificed a mother's blessing;
 Love is my pride, and love my happiness!

RONALD.

Take courage from thy conscious innocence,
 And trust to time to recompense thy patience.

GRISELDA.

And will the longed for moment e'er arrive,
 Which brings him back to these his daughter's arms?

RONALD.

Arrive it will, and sooner than thou thinkest.
 His spirit lingers still within these walls,
 'Mid all his well known haunts, and eager asked he
 How 't went with this, and how with that fell out,
 And more than once, with father-like concern,
 He seemed to dwell upon his grandchild's image.

GRISELDA.

Ah! say you so?

RONALD.

'Tis true, so hope the best.

Soon as the half extinguished glow of passion
 Begins to pale before his better judgment—
 When longings after days of former joys—
 His daughter's presence, and his grandchild's prattle—
 Recur to him— when never wearying prayer,
 With flatt'ring earnestness, his rest invades—
 Then wide at once he throws a father's arms;
 Just as the rock, long shaken by the winds,
 And by the strife of breakers undermined,
 Yields sudden to their force, and topples down.

GRISELDA.

Thou dropp'st the dew of hope upon my heart,
 Thy cheering words refresh my very soul.
 Accept my thanks!— Betake thyself to rest!

RONALD.

God guard thee, Lady!— Gentle be thy slumbers!

(*Exit.*)

GRISELDA

(after having been for some time lost in meditation.)

“The mother died, and saw her child no more!”—

Oh blesséd Spirit, if from yonder Heav’n
Thou lookest down on this our earthly vale,
Forgiv’st thou, that thou lack’dst a daughter’s hand
To close thy dying eyes?— and that thy bosom
Heaved forth in other arms its latest sigh?—
Thou, like thy daughter, by the dear one led,
Didst leave the home and country of thy birth—
New ties, another home thou formd’st around thee,
And in thy father’s house becam’st a stranger!—
Yes, thou forgiv’st that duty tow’rds my husband
And love, detained me from thy dying couch,
Though fruitless longings pained thy parting hour,
And thy soul mourned thy child’s ingratitude.—

Oh bitter accusation! harsh suspicion!
Is evil linked, then, ever with excess?—
Even in love—in excellence itself?
And can I love my Percival too much?
Or can I, for his undivided gift
Of heart and life, return him less than mine—
My heart— my life unfettered and entire?
Was not my oath, eternal truth and love?—
Is’t not alike my duty and my joy—
The purest joy on earth— beloved, to love
Again, and make the cherished object happy?
Hold fast, my heart, to this thy love! preserve
Thy mind’s serenity, and bear, unmoved.

Imputed error and thy father's wrath!
 A drop of wormwood is a trifling price
 To pay for love's unclouded happiness!

(Goes to the window.)

Profoundest Night envelopes ev'ry valley,
 And stares at me with wide and gloomy eye! —
 I will to bed! Belovéd Percival!
 Think'st thou of me amid the palace pomp
 And glitter? — Yes! I know thou think'st of me;
 For as thy image stands before my soul,
 So mine in friendly guise round thee must hover.
 Good night! Good night! Belovéd Percival!
 Now see I to my child, and then to bed.

*(Griselda turns to depart, and has reached the side door, when
 Percival, Tristram, Gavin enter by the principal door.)*

SCENE SECOND.

Percival, Tristram, Gavin, Griselda.

PERCIVAL.

Griselda!

GRISELDA

(rushing to him.)

Percival! — Dear Percival!

Do I again behold my Percival?

PERCIVAL.

I greet thee well, Griselda!

GRISELDA

(in Percival's arms.)

Have I thee

Again, my love? So long thy absence seemed!—
 Three long, long days— Thou never thought'st of me—
 But paid'st thy court to all those ladies yonder!
 What! no? Thou didst not so?— Still thou shalt never—
 No, never leave me more— Another kiss!—
 And how the burning sun has browned thy cheeks!—
 Ah me! 'tis sweet to rest upon thy bosom!—
 My Percival! Protector! Husband! Lord!

PERCIVAL.

Griselda, see!

GRISELDA.

And think what thou hast missed!

Our little boy— our darling Athelstane
 Ran, free from leading-strings, across the hall,
 Nor made a single trip!— I thought old Allan
 For very joy had wept, to see the child.
 And only think, my little doves are fledged!—
 Sad, too, I've been, sad even unto death,
 Not from thy absence only; other things
 Have sore disquieted me!— But let us see
 If thou hast ever thought on wife and child,
 What pretty things hast brought us from the palace?—
 How! Nothing? Then thou hast indeed forgott'n us,
 Thou naughty one!

PERCIVAL.

But see, Griselda. pray!

I bring thee guests home! — Bid them gracious welcome!
 Good friends of mine they are, and gallant Knights
 O' th' famed Round Table. Dost thou hear, Griselda?

GRISELDA

(in much confusion.)

Forgive me, worthy Sirs, I saw but him.

TRISTRAM.

Let not our presence, Lady, we beseech thee,
 Embitter the delights of such a meeting,
 Or mar the full enjoyment of thy bliss.

PERCIVAL.

A truce to compliments, Sir Tristram, pray!
 I answer for your being both most welcome.
 Is't not so, wife?

GRISELDA.

You are indeed, brave Sirs!
 Tho' late, I bid you both a cordial welcome!
 Permit me to conduct you to the Hall.

PERCIVAL.

No, we stay here!

GRISELDA.

I fear you wake the child;
 He's sleeping yonder; wouldst thou kiss thy babe?

PERCIVAL

To morrow's time enough! — And now, Griselda,
 Provide us wine and suitable refreshment!

We've ridden hard, and there without it rages,
 As if it fain would sweep both earth and stars
 Away! — Griselda, go!

GRISELDA.

I go, my Lord.

What e'er the house affords is at your service:
 Wake not, I pray you, Sirs, my sleeping infant!
 (*Exit.*)

SCENE THIRD.

PERCIVAL

(*throws himself into an arm-chair.*)

Once more, my worthy Sirs, I bid you welcome
 To my poor castle of Pendennys here!
 That *I* am so, yourselves; methinks, have seen.
 What say you to the collier's daughter? Eh!

GAVIN.

Ne'er spake a purer mind from fairer features,
 And tho' too oft appearances deceive,
 Her eye betrays her innate worth of soul,
 As the blue flame denotes the hidden treasure.

TRISTRAM.

Simplicity sits smiling on her brow;
 And graceful Modesty, e'en like the down
 Upon the peach, her nature seems to veil.

PERCIVAL.

You see then, Sirs, that I am no vain boaster.
 My wife is fair — that she has other charms —
 That I've not entered rashly on this contest,
 You soon shall learn and herald to the world.
 Vict'ry is mine, the Queen must kneel to me!

GAVIN.

Griselda loves her child, she will refuse it.

PERCIVAL

(*springing up.*)

An idle dream! Refuse her child to *me*! —
 Hew me this arm off, if I conquer not.
 I was as certain of success, before
 I pledged my word — aye, by my beard! as sure, —
 As if I'd had it under hand and seal.
 It was for me she left her parents' side,
 By me remained in all their deep affliction;
 Vict'ry is mine, the Queen must kneel to me!

TRISTRAM.

And you would rack, and torture to the death
 A wife, whose truth and child-like purity
 Shone only brighter in the hour of need —
 Probe with the dagger's point a heart, which beats
 For you alone, and fill with tears those eyes,
 Which seek in yours responsive beams of love!
 Oh, yet reflect! abide not by your purpose!

PERCIVAL.

St. David, Sir! it ever was my way
 To hold my purpose firm, nor change I now,
 When such a stirring contest piques the will,
 Inflames the blood, and strings my ev'ry nerve:
 Clearing away all sadness from my soul,
 As winds disperse the mists in yonder valley.
 By Heav'n! this very night shall prove her virtue!
 Victory is mine, the Queen must kneel to me!

TRISTRAM.

Oh, not to-night! Grant her to-night's repose—
 Embitter not the pleasure of your coming;
 Sorrow to-night were doubly sorrowful!

PERCIVAL.

And *should* I make her sorrowful, what then?—
 Sweet is the waking from a painful dream.
 If 'tis my humour and my own good pleasure,
 To mortify by abstinence my body—
 Or my own back to lacerate with scourges—
 To scratch my hand with this my dagger point,
 Who dares to blame me? Who?— And is not she
 Bone of my bone—flesh of my flesh—my wife?
 Enough! you say she loves me—let her prove it.

TRISTRAM.

Your's be the deed, I gave you honest counsel.

PERCIVAL.

I pant for vict'ry! and, by yonder Heav'n,
 This night, this very hour it shall be mine!
 Here will I sit, and dress my face in sadness,
 And knit my brows in furrows so profound,
 That never murky night's dark thunder-cloud
 Was fraught with deeper threat'nings than my aspect;
 My sighs shall put the very storm to silence.—
 Sir Gavin, opportunely I bethink me—
 A poor old woman, who was erst my nurse,
 Dwells in an humble cot below the castle;
 To her entrust the infant, when Griselda—
 But hush! she comes.

TRISTRAM.

Yet once, Sir Percival!

PERCIVAL.

Of words, enough! As judges now you stand,
 To mark the contest and my victory.

SCENE FOURTH.

*To these enter Griselda, followed by servants with
 drinking-cups etc.*

GRISELDA.

I've cared for your repast, it comes anon.
 Meanwhile refresh yourselves, my honoured Sirs,
 With a full goblet of this noble wine.
 I drink to you, and claim a friendly pledge.

GAVIN.

Lady, I drink to your prosperity!

TRISTRAM.

May sorrows lightly pass, and joys endure!

GRISELDA.

In happy hour you have escaped the storm,
Which rages now so wildly in the mountains.
'The Thunder's voice has wakened ev'ry echo,
And flash on flash the busy light'nings fly.

GAVIN.

A guardian Angel shields you from its fury.

GRISELDA.

You are too kind, Sir Knight!

(The servants retire, Griselda approaches Percival, who has thrown himself into an arm-chair, and appears lost in thought.)

How, Percival!

You will not drink? And you refuse the wine
You thirsted for but now?— What ails my Lord?—
A gloomy sternness veils your ev'ry feature!—
A dark and sullen flame glows in your eye!—
Ah! whither is your smile of greeting fled?—
You sigh?— Oh, Percival, dispel my growing fears!
What ails my Lord?—

PERCIVAL.

'Tis weariness— nought else!

GRISELDA.

No, no! deceive me not, for never sat
Dejection's shades more sadly on thy brow.
What ails my Percival? Ah, quickly say!

PERCIVAL.

No, not to-night, I spare thee till to-morrow.

GRISELDA.

Oh, tell me *now*, what I am doomed to hear!
And bid me not, in anxious fear to pass
The silent watches of the lagging night!

PERCIVAL.

If such thy wish, then know, the King is sore
Displeased, that I upon the royal oak
Have grafted a twig of humble willow-tree,
And that the heir of all my pow'r and riches
Has sprung to life from out a peasant's womb;
He therefore has decreed that we deliver,
Without delay, our child into his hands,
And menaces with exile my refusal.

GRISELDA

(after a pause, with an unembarassed laugh.)

Thou'rt jesting, Percival, thou hop'st to dupe me,
And then wilt laugh at my credulity.
Thou canst not look me boldly in the face,
Try if thou canst! — Ah no! thou shunn'st mine eye—
Smiles tremble on thy lips— thou laugh'st— Go to!
Seek other pastime, for thou fright'st me not.

PERCIVAL.

Thou dup'st thyself; my ev'ry word is truth.

(Pointing to Gavin and Tristram.)

These are the bearers of the King's command,
And bound to see his orders executed.

GRISELDA.

And *you* would then kidnap my little one! —
Go, seek some strange disguise, before I fear you!
The mountain Demons track their infant prey,
With sound of clanking chains and hideous yell;
And goblins rarely, worthy Sirs, appear
With spur on heel and clad in knightly garb. *

PERCIVAL.

Thou credit'st not my word, and, like a child,
Thou smil'st, and playest heedlessly with horrors.
Speak ye then, heralds of the King's commands,
Bear witness to my truth!

TRISTRAM.

Sir Percival

Speaks truly.

GAVIN.

Yes, 'tis even as he says;
Our mission here is to receive thy child.

GRISELDA.

Then 'tis no jesting? — And the King will tear
My child — my sweetest infant from my heart?

* Vid. Note 10.

Why? — Wherefore? — Shall my infant child do penance,
Because his mother's origin was humble?

PERCIVAL.

So wills the King, and he is absolute;
'Tis vain to strive against his high decree.
You must resign the infant to his hands.

GRISELDA.

And canst thou — wilt thou, Percival, resolve, —
Canst thou e'en *think* on such a sacrifice? —
What! ne'er again behold those sunny features,
Replete with smiles and fearless confidence? —
Ne'er hear the tender accents of that voice
In lisping flattery salute thee: "Father"? —
Oh! wilt thou, Percival, disown thy child? —
Think on the happy day which saw his birth,
When first thou took'st him to a father's breast,
And cried'st with joyful voice: "It is a boy!" —
Think on the happy tumult of thy joy;
E'en *me* thou then forgott'st, and from his looks
Sprung forth to thee a fountain of delight.
No star too distant then appeared to thee,
To shed its light and lustre o'er his days.
And now thou giv'st him up? — I can't believe it.
Who dare deprive the lion of his young? —
No! Percival surrenders not his child!

PERCIVAL.

I must! — Whichever way I turn my eyes,
I see no means of safety, or escape.

This path alone lies open to my choice;
The King so wills it, and I yield my child!

GRISELDA.

Cadmór thou slewest, and the Danish Swaine!
Who vanquished kings, may well abide their wrath.
No, Percival, thou yieldest not thy child.
By each imaginable sacrifice
Appease the King; thy life — thy blood be his; —
Thy child — thine only child — thou *canst not* yield!

PERCIVAL.

I tell thee, wife, I *must*, thou plead'st in vain,
I must resign the infant — and I will.

GRISELDA.

Mine is the child, as thine — and *I* will keep him,
If thou resignest him. My blood he is —
Mine is the womb from which he sprung to life —
Mine is the breast that fed him — mine the eye
That watched, in silent joy, his tender growth —
And all my future rests upon his head. —
Shall strange caprice, then, rob me of my child,
And take from him a mother's shelt'ring love?

(She stops suddenly, then proceeds with wild rapidity.)

Nor right, nor claim the King has to my boy.
He knows him not — his very birth displeased him, —
He hates him — and yet covets his possession —

(With sudden vehemence, to the Knights.)

Say, gentlemen, what would he with the child? —
What, silent! — Speak, what would he with the boy? —

TRISTRAM.

Fear not! The King is ever just and mild.

GAVIN.

Whate'er the King decrees must be fulfilled;
We hold his orders, but his purpose know not.

GRISELDA

(with wild vehemence.)

You make me not your dupe! — Upon your brows,
And in your troubled looks, I see inscribed
That he will kill him! Is't not so? — It is! —
For this, ye would my sweetest infant drag
From out a mother's arms? First quench these orbs
In darkness! — Bloody murderers, come on!
Tear him ye would from 'midst his gentle dreams? —
First step across a mother's lifeless corse!
Shed his young blood? — First steep your hands in mine!
Deserted child! A father guards thee not,
That task be mine — a woman, but a *mother*!

GAVIN

(to Tristram.)

Full well I knew she ne'er would yield the child.

PERCIVAL

(aside.)

Now then or never!

(To Griselda.)

Well then let it be so!

Griselda, keep thy child, but henceforth guard
His precious head with ever wakeful eye,

Protect him from the very breath of Heav'n,
 Guard him as thou wouldst guard a gem — a crown,
 For thou hast paid a costly price for him! —
 The child is ransomed with the father's life!

GRISELDA

(in alarm)

Thy life, my Percival!

PERCIVAL.

Why tremblest thou?

Thy child remains! — What tho' the outlaw's ban
 My head proscribe — my pow'r annihilate!
 What tho' the King's unwearied rage pursue me,
 And hunt me like a beast of prey! What tho' —
 O'erreached by treason, or by force o'ercome —
 I'm doomed to fall upon a bloody scaffold
 By headsman's hand! — Griselda, tremble not!
 Seek not to sepulchre my bleaching bones,
 Enough, thy darling child has been preserved!

GRISELDA

*(remains a few moments, with her eye fixed, and hands folded
 on her breast; then proceeds in slow and faint accents.)*

The outlaw's ban awaits thee? — And thy life
 Is threatened by the King?

PERCIVAL.

So is't, Griselda!

GRISELDA

(scarcely articulate.)

Then take the child! —

PERCIVAL.

No longer thou resistest —
But giv'st thine infant to the King?

GRISELDA.

I must!!!

PERCIVAL.

The day is mine! — Sir Gavin, take the boy!

(Gavin goes towards the adjoining chamber, Griselda rushes after him.)

GRISELDA.

Yet hold! — No, take him! — Stop! — Oh! God of
Heaven!

Resolve I cannot.

PERCIVAL.

Come to me, Griselda!

(Griselda falls at Percival's feet, presses her clasped hands on his knees, and looks silently, but imploringly, up to him. Gavin goes into the adjoining chamber, as the curtain falls.)

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT THIRD.

PENDENNYS CASTLE.

A richly ornamented hall. In the fore-ground, an elevated seat; in the back-ground, a curtain which separates the hall from the ante-room.

SCENE FIRST.

Percival sitting in an arm-chair, in deep thought.

PERCIVAL

(rising hastily.)

Right then or wrong?— There lies the knotty point! —
To use my right can never wrong be deemed,
And acting as I ought, I should be happy! —
But yet I feel not so; — why then is this? —

(He walks up and down in agitation, then, stopping suddenly, proceeds.)

'Tis but a phantom which torments me thus!
So long with anxious wish I've sought to know —
Not merely to believe (for where's the folly
That's not at times believed?) — but sought to *know* —
With mine own eyes to see — with ears to hear —
To feel conviction living in my grasp!
Yes! I have sighed for *proof*, and I have longed
That Destiny should send some searching ordeal.

And shall I shrink before its coming shadow?
 I prove my war-horse, ere I trust to him;
 I prove my buckler's strength — my weapon's temper,
 Before I rush into the battle throng,
 And shall I not in such wise prove my wife?—
 Shall a mere phantom of the brain impede
 My wish to penetrate her soul's recesses?
 To see my image clearly mirrored there,
 And mine alone, without a rival near—
 To know her nature so subdued to mine,
 My slightest glance, my very breath can move her—
 To know she trembles, if I raise my eye-brow—
 My will the standard of her life and feeling—
 To know that on this earth I am her All—
 Her Lord, her King, her Destiny, her God?—
 For love admits no question of degree,
 Love suffers neither measure nor division;
 Let but a grain be wanting to its fullness—
 A sun-beam's mote, and it is love no more!
 And shall I cling to possibilities,
 When *certainty* is consequent on trial?
 And, when I may luxuriate in conviction,
 Shall a mere empty confidence suffice me?—
 'Tis but a phantom which torments me thus!

SCENE SECOND.

Percival, Gavin, afterwards Tristram.

PERCIVAL

(turning hastily to Gavin.)

Now, Gavin, say, where have you left my boy?

GAVIN.

In trusty keeping, noble Percival!

But filled with anger 'gainst the stranger nurse,

Whom with his hands he scornfully repels.

He weeps, and threatens to complain to you,

That they have torn him from his mother's arms.

PERCIVAL.

And would he then accuse me to myself?—

Now, by my oath! the boy is not so wrong,

And, come the time, I make him full amends.

Hast summoned all my vassals to the castle?

GAVIN.

To ev'ry quarter was your mandate sent,

And ev'ry valley pours its natives forth.

PERCIVAL.

I thank thee, Gavin.

(To Tristram who enters.)

Say, what news, Sir Tristram?

Hast seen Griselda?

TRISTRAM.

Yes, Sir Knight. I have.

PERCIVAL.

In deep affliction and in tears you found her?—
You hesitate! — Speak, Tristram, tell me all!

TRISTRAM.

I sought your Lady, to announce that you
Desired her presence here, and passed through all
Th' apartments, till I reached the turret-stair,
Which upwards to the Oriel-parlour leads;
Ascending this, I found her chamber door
Wide open, and affording thus free scope
To sight and hearing;— there I saw Griselda.
With hanging tresses, loose and unadorned,
She sat like marble statue, motionless;
Death's living image, scarce she seemed to breathe;
A faded rose-leaf would have shamed her cheek,
And such a sea of grief escaped her eyes,
'That, of a truth, her lips, o'erflowed by tears,
Imbibed an actual draught of bitterness.
A rattle lay upon her lap, her child's
Delight, but now the whetstone of her sorrow;
With body somewhat forward bent, and hands
Reclining listless on her lap, she sat,
And fixed her rigid eye immoveable
Upon the empty cradle of her infant.—
Now struggled forth a long, heart-rending sigh
From out the deep recesses of her breast,
Redoubled flowed the stream of briny tears,
And, pressing wild the rattle to her lips,

She shrieked, till Heav'n and Earth returned the echo,
 "My child! my child! where is my sweetest child?"—
 And, with the cry, some chord within her heart
 Had sprung, and lifeless fell she to the earth.

PERCIVAL.

Enough, enough!

TRISTRAM.

Supported by her women,
 Her glimm'ring pow'rs of life again appeared;
 And she arose and fixed an earnest eye
 Upon a picture, where the Holy Virgin
 With sorrowing aspect looks upon her Son;
 Then tott'ring forwards, sank on bended knee—
 Folded her pious hands across her breast,
 And, while convulsive spasms moved her lips,
 She bowed her head. E'en at the very moment,
 The cloudy veil, which lay on hill and valley,
 Was torn asunder, and a ray of sun-shine
 Kissed her sweet face and lighted ev'ry feature.
 She smiled. Oh, Percival! it seemed to say:
 "The bud has fall'n, soon comes the withered flow'r."

(Percival fixes his eyes on the ground; after a pause, Tristram proceeds.)

This saw I, Sir, with deepest sympathy,
 And, all unmanned by aspect of her grief,
 I hurried quickly forth with moistened eye,
 And left your orders with her waiting-women.

PERCIVAL

(after a pause, raising himself proudly.)

What! can it be thou tremblest, Percival?
 And shall a woman's tears disturb thy purpose?
 The cup is filled, and she must empty it—
 The Fiat's forth and must be executed.
 I will — I must — retreat is now cut off.

TRISTRAM.

Retreat cut off? And when it lies so near?
 A word's enough to soothe Griselda's woe;
 A single word can dissipate those clouds,
 Which fling their starless night around her heart.
 Unfold the riddle of this cruel pastime,
 And lay the infant in his mother's arms.

PERCIVAL.

And leave my honour and my word in pawn?

TRISTRAM.

Thou mayst at once redeem them with the Queen.

PERCIVAL.

How! think you I will ever kneel to her?

TRISTRAM.

'Tis meet that Pride atone for Pride's offence.

PERCIVAL.

Not for the treasures of the Universe!
 Not e'en for life — for Paradise itself!
 A woman's tears are like a summer shower,
 Which sparkles down from out some passing cloud.

Soon is it past — the sun beams forth again,
 And brighter verdure decks the freshened plain.
 Hers is the task to prove what love can do;
 But when she once has reached the distant goal,
 When all the clouds, which compass her, have passed,
 Then shall the sparkling rainbow of delight
 Shine, with its thousand hues, above her head,
 And life become one universal joy.
 Much I require, and hard, mayhap, you deem me.
 But compensation, too, is mine to give.

GAVIN.

See, yonder wave the banners on the mountains,
 And weapons glitter from the valleys' depths;
 It is thy people who assemble, Percival.

PERCIVAL.

Then must I go to welcome their approach.
 Meanwhile do you, with mild and peaceful words,
 Prepare the tender soul of my Griselda
 For the new pangs, which are awaiting her.

GAVIN.

Count upon us.

TRISTRAM.

Your wish shall be fulfilled.

PERCIVAL.

Then, fare ye well! The game will soon be over.
 I revel in anticipated triumph!

(Exit.)

TRISTRAM.

Triumph thou mayst, but the recording Angel,
Who marks the fruit our earthly actions bear,
Will write thy triumph as discomfiture.

GAVIN.

Griselda comes; her train of waiting-women
Support her slowly through the castle halls.

TRISTRAM.

Oh, sight of misery! Her heavy head
Is bent, like ripened corn-ear, to the earth!

SCENE THIRD.

Enter Griselda, accompanied by her women.

GRISELDA

(to her attendants.)

Accept my grateful thanks for this your love,
No further do my steps require assistance.
I pray you, leave me now, 'tis over quite.

(The attendants retire to the back of the stage, Griselda advances.)

Say, noble Sirs, where tarries Percival?
It is at his behest that I am here.

GAVIN.

'Twill not be long before thy Lord return.

TRISTRAM.

You turn yourself in anger from our looks,
And bitter thoughts are wakened by our presence.

Just, Lady, is thy hate, and thy reproach,
Though wordless, speaks in thunders to my soul.

GRISELDA.

Hate, noble Sirs! — I hate you not, believe me.
None do I hate — no, not the King himself!

GAVIN.

Yet his the hand which struck this cruel blow.

GRISELDA.

The deed was his — the will came from above!
He guided not the hand, which bruised my head;
Th' Almighty Being, who has but to breathe,
And crowns go circling round like gossamer, —
Who moves an eye-brow, and a kingdom falls —
Who nods, and worlds arise and planets shine —
Who nods again, they pass! — 'twas *He* who struck me.
The Lord would test the strength of this proud heart,
And lo! it broke and melted into tears!

TRISTRAM.

So pious and submissive is thy sorrow!

GRISELDA.

I, pious and submissive? — No! I am
Proud — full of dark and supercilious pride.
For, lowly as my origin had been,
Still, did I not regard the hand and love
Of Percival, as if they were my due?
Was I not proud of being called his spouse,
And ever vaunting forth my darling child?

Yes! 'twas because I owned not bounteous Heaven,
 But took as *right* its mild beneficence,
 That God now warns me through my Innocent,
 Who, guiltless, suffers for a mother's guilt.

TRISTRAM.

Oh, may you long preserve the pious thoughts,
 Which cheer you now and arm your soul with patience.
 For with still darker mien Fate strides towards you,
 Still greater sacrifice the King requires.

GRISELDA.

Still greater sacrifice! Say, what requires he?
 Is Percival the object of his anger?
 Will he my life? — Oh, haste and tell me all!

GAVIN.

Fear not for Percival, your head is menaced
 By Arthur's wrath.

GRISELDA.

Oh, tell me then his bidding!
 What will he? Speak!

GAVIN.

Then, Lady, hear; he will
 That Percival dissolve the holy tie,
 Which binds him unto thee, and choose a partner
 Of race as famed and noble as his own,
 To bear him offspring worthy of his might.

GRISELDA.

Oh, dark Creation of my troubled dreams! —
 So soon thou 'rt realized? — Shall *one* day tear

Joy's flow'ry chaplets from my brows away,
 And pluck the latest blossoms of my hope?
 My husband and my child! — Alone! forsaken!
 Can *one* poor breast contain a sea of woe?
 And he? — and Percival? — Oh, quickly tell me!
 What said my Percival? —

TRISTRAM.

With heavy heart
 He yields obedience, that the stream of time
 May not erase all traces of his line,
 But bear his name to late posterity.

GRISELDA.

All my forebodings true! — In stillest midnight
 It came athwart my spirit! — Too overflowing —
 Too bless'd for this life, was my happiness!
 It only as a dream could float around me,
 And like a happy dream it vanisheth. —
 It must be so! — My path lies clear before me! —
 Why should he live without a father's joys?
 To strangers his inheritance transfer? —
 Who is't condemns him? He has acted right.

GAVIN.

Mark you, Sir Tristram, well? She would defend him.

GRISELDA.

Then turn again unto thy woodland shades,
 Thou child of poverty and servitude!
 Thy place was never in this lordly castle,

Then boldly turn thy back upon its threshold.
 Thou tak'st his image with thee, and thy dreams.
 Thy Percival has loved thee, and his love
 No royal mandate can obliterate.
 He shares with thee the anguish of this parting,
 Still will he think of thee, forget thee—never.
 Take comfort then, my heart, learn resignation!
 Be strong! before him ev'ry tear suppress,
 Nor aggravate, with vain complaints, his sorrow!—
 But must I hence to-day, my worthy Sirs?
 And shall I see my Percival no more?

GAVIN.

Sir Percival himself proclaims your sentence;
 To day in open Court, before his vassals,
 He will dissolve the tie which binds you to him,
 And send you to your mountain forests back.

TRISTRAM.

His rapid foot-steps through the hall resound—
 Then summon all your fortitude to aid,
 And calmly meet your cruel destiny.

SCENE FOURTH.

Percival enters with his principal vassals, ascends the steps, and remains standing near the chair of state. The curtain in the back ground is drawn aside, and the rest of his retainers slowly and silently advance.

PERCIVAL

(after a pause.)

Hail, war-companions! faithful vassals, hail!
 In goodly muster, as it well became you,
 Have you to-day, obedient to my call,
 Assembled in my castle of Pendennys.
 As yet, perchance, you wonder at the summons,
 And vainly seek, with doubtful questionings,
 To know the cause; be this your answer then:
 Ye know full well that, yielding to your prayers,
 I chose Griselda yonder for my spouse—
 The forest child, from humble stock descended,
 Though rich in prudence, loveliness and truth—
 Ye know she bare to me an infant son,
 And him ye hailed as heir of all my power;
 But Arthur has seen fit—our royal Master—
 To set aside this marriage and its fruits.
 He bids me place my infant in his hands,
 That the high rank and honours of my race
 Be not from eagle's brood transferred to bird
 Of humbler flight. I have obeyed his wish—

(Griselda shudders, Percival after a pause proceeds.)

And giv'n the child to these his deputies.

King Arthur further wills, I wed his sister,
 And banish from my house and bed Griselda;
 And this in open Court, before my vassals,
 As erst before them I proclaimed her mine.
 And, in obedience to the King's command,
 I've now assembled you within this hall,
 That you might witness its accomplishment.

FIRST KNIGHT.

How, Percival! —

SECOND KNIGHT.

And thou hast then resolved —

THIRD KNIGHT.

Thou wouldst repudiate thy wife — Griselda? —

PERCIVAL.

Peace, yonder! — hold! on peril of my anger!
 You 're summoned here to-day, as witnesses,
 But not as judges of your Chieftain's actions.
 Observe and listen, but restrain your tongues! —
 Approach, Griselda, nearer!

GRISELDA.

Noble Sir!

PERCIVAL.

Know, that the blessed tie, which made us one,
 To-day is severed — severed from this hour!

Griselda, dost thou hear me?

GRISELDA.

Sir, I do.

PERCIVAL.

To-day must see thee from these walls depart,
 And thou must leave whate'er my love bestowed
 Of trinkets, robes and other ornaments,
 Which heighten, but create not, woman's charms;
 For 'tis the order of the Sovereign,
 That, helpless, poor, in humble garb arrayed,
 Thou quitt'st my castle, as thou enter'dst it;
 And so, before the King's Commissioners —
 The executors of his high decree —
 I do dismiss thee. — Hence! —

GRISELDA.

Most noble Sir!

When from my lowly cot thou hither brought'st me —
 To these proud halls — thus wedding Poverty
 To Pow'r, exalted Name to Lowliness —
 Enriching with thy love a peasant girl —
 And when my happiness as quickly bloomed
 As flow'rs, which blossom in a single night,
 Then spake a warning voice within my heart:
 "No longer than the flow'r endures thy bliss —
 "It withers, as it blossomed, in a night." —
 And yielding, humbly, to the will of Fate,
 Thy plight, as loan I took, and not as gift —

Freely to be reclaimed, as once 'twas made,
 Tho' Love, meanwhile, pay faithful interest.
 Thou say'st the day of reck'ning is arrived,
 I'm ready to account.— Here, then, take back
 Whate'er thy hand bestowed on me! — take back
 My decorations of nobility,
 My pow'r, precedence, splendour, sounding name —
 The gifts thou so profusely show'rdst upon me.
 Yet *one*, my bruised heart delays to give—
 Costliest, dearest, prized beyond all price—
 'Tis this — this ring, thy early pledge of love,
 Which sealed the blessed bond that made us one;
 It was my All! — Yet, take it, Percival!
 Now, helpless, poor, in humble garb arrayed,
 I quit thy castle, as I entered it.

PERCIVAL.

Thou takest with thee, what thou hither brought'st,
 Nor less, nor more.

GRISELDA.

My Lord, thou know'st the guise,
 In which thou took'st me from my father's house;
 An apron, and a sorry woollen garb
 Were all I brought. I need no sumpter train
 To bear my poor and humble wardrobe hence.

PERCIVAL.

Then take thy apron, and thy woollen garb.

GRISELDA.

I do so, Sir. — What more belonged to me,
 When I exchanged a cottage for a castle —
 'The early bloom of innocence, the spring
 Of buoyant youth, the fond confiding heart—
 'Gainst these, I place the joys that I have tasted,
 And mem'ry's pleasures still in store for me. *
 In one thing still remainest thou my debtor; —
 My love for ever must abide with thee;
 And, as my hand the pressure of thy ring,
 My heart retains thy dearly cherished image.

PERCIVAL.

A barbéd arrow is her ev'ry word,
 Her ev'ry look cuts deeper than a sword; —
 Away, Griselda, for thy hour is come!

FIRST KNIGHT.

My heart will break 'twixt anger and compassion!

SECOND KNIGHT.

Oh, that my duty bridled not my tongue!

GRISELDA.

One only word now hovers on my lips,
 'Then, turning from these lofty halls away,
 I seek the bosom of my forest shades.
 Farewell, my Percival! — This loving heart
 Will ne'er forget the bliss, thou'st made it feel;
 'Twill think of thee, after my memory
 In these loved scenes has flickered and expired.

* Vid. Note 11.

For like a dry and withered leaf 's the Past,
 Swept quick away by Time's rude hurricane.
 But, oh, for thee, be happy days in store!
 May Heav'n thy noble brow with blessings crown!
 And show'r, with lavish and unwearied hand,
 The laurel wreaths of vict'ry on thy head!
 May noble scions spring from thy proud stem!
 And may a worthier woman fill my place!
 Oh! I shall smile—smile e'en amid my tears—
 If happier she make thee;—'tis not hers
 To love thee more—earth offers no such love.

PERCIVAL

(in softer accents, and with difficulty restraining his emotion.)

Depart, Griselda, for thy hour is come!

GRISELDA.

My arms are thrown wide open to embrace thee,
 But empty they remain; my eye seeks thine,
 But thou conceal'st thy features from my gaze!—
 Yes, thou art right; for why increase my woe,
 And drive my deep dejection to despair?
 Since part we must, oh, let us quickly part!—
 Farewell, my Percival!— With this one word,
 I set Affliction's chalice to my lips,
 And drain it off; for this one bitter word
 Says all,—in Misery's vocabulary
 Is found no other. Percival, farewell!

PERCIVAL.

Depart, Griselda! — Hence!

GRISELDA

(with a look towards Heaven.)

The Lord above

So wills it, and his Handmaiden obeys.

(She turns towards the back of the stage, Percival, deeply moved, conceals his face, while Griselda's attendants throng round their mistress.)

FIRST ATTENDANT.

And dost thou leave us?

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Lady, wilt thou go?

THIRD ATTENDANT.

Oh, let me kiss the border of thy robe!

GRISELDA.

Forbear! My time is come, I must away!

FIRST KNIGHT.

Farewell, Griselda!

SECOND KNIGHT.

God be ever with you!

GRISELDA.

Fare ye all well! The Fate, that drives me forth,
Leaves me one consolation in my woe,
Unwept I go not, tho' I weeping go.

(Griselda retires through the crowd, who accompany her with loud lamentations. Percival keeps his eyes fixed on her, till she has quitted the hall, then steps hastily down, seizes Tristram by the arm, and leads him hurriedly forward.)

PERCIVAL.

Tristram, I was too hard, 'fore God I was! —
'Twas not well done of me!

TRISTRAM.

Thou followdst blindly
The secret impulse of thy pride; 'tis past!
The deed was thine, now learn to bear its sting.

PERCIVAL.

I was too hard — with misery repaid
Her love, and changed her soul's pure harmony
Into rough discord.

(Trumpets are heard.)

Hark! The clang of trumpets!
Who greets with joy's acclaim this fated house?

GAVIN

(at the window.)

A waving throng of menials occupy
The Castle court-yard, and a troop of riders
Press through the sounding arches of the gate,
With England's colours floating at their head. —
It is the Queen, attended by her Ladies;
And Lancelot, I see, is in her train.

PERCIVAL.

Would that the thunder-storm would drive her home,
From whence she came!

TRISTRAM

(at the window.)

Yes! 'tis the Queen indeed.

Sir Lancelot assists her from her palfrey;
Supported by his arm, she nears the porch,
From which Griselda, by the crowd borne forth,
Takes her departure.

PERCIVAL.

How! — Griselda, say you?

TRISTRAM.

Griselda. See! the Queen she recognizes,
And a deep crimson mantles on her cheek;
She presses to the wall and bends the knee,
But Queen Ginevra proudly brushes past her,
Nor deems thy Lady worthy of a glance.
Again the thronging people bear her on,
And to the gate she turns her languid steps.

GAVIN.

Sir Percival, Ginevra is approaching!

SCENE FIFTH.

To these enter Queen Ginevra, attended by Lancelot, Oriana and other Knights and Ladies. Percival advances with Tristram and Gavin, to give her welcome.

GINEVRA.

Much fear we, noble Percival, that we
 Appear unwelcome guests within your castle,
 As undecided still the victory
 Between us hangs; yet venture we to hope,
 You will the rites of hospitality
 E'en to your foes extend, and grant us now
 A shelt'ring roof; and this more willingly,
 As we are heralds of the King's approach.
 He hunts in Stafford's wood, and hopes to find
 Refreshment here and quarters for the night.

PERCIVAL.

Here in Pendennys shall he greeting find
 As welcome, as within his royal palace.

GINEVRA.

Sir Knight, we thank you for this kind reception.
 And now permit us, Percival, to ask
 Whence was yon crowd by which we were surrounded?
 And why the stirring hum of mingling voices
 Which met our ear? Hold you high festival
 To-day, Sir Knight, or haply, court of justice?—
 And who was yonder woman, by the crowd
 Encircled, who stepped tow'rds us from the porch?

PERCIVAL.

That *woman*, Madam, was my wife, Griselda,
From whose maternal heart I've torn a child —
Griselda, whom I have with scorn cast forth!

GINEVRA.

Griselda, say you?

ORIANA.

Did she give the child?

TRISTRAM.

With scalding tears, but with undaunted courage
She made the sacrifice for Percival.

LANCELOT.

She gave the child? — and now she quits Pendennys? —
And of her own free will, without resistance? —

TRISTRAM.

Weeping herself and wept by all, she left
These lordly halls, to seek her lowly cot;
No sound of anger once escaped her lips,
And the last word she uttered was a blessing.

GAVIN.

'Tis even as he says, I vouch for it;
'Tis past my comprehension!

PERCIVAL.

Yes, Ginevra!

If ever on the rugged paths of earth
One of God's angels visibly hath walked,

Hatred for love, for blessings curses reaping,
 That angel is the lowly born Griselda.
 I have redeemed my impious word, Ginevra;
 Suffice it so, nor further desecrate,
 In cruel sport, the Heaven of that breast;
 Sorrow no longer shall consume her soul;
 We know her value, let us honour it!

LANCELOT.

Oh, let it be so, Queen! Away with all
 Resentment, all provocatives to strife!
 And let a word a word's offence atone.

GINEVRA.

Sir Lancelot, when we require your counsel,
 We shall take care to give you timely notice.
 But you, Sir Percival, indeed surprise us!
 Is this the man whose supercilious pride
 A peasant girl exalted over us?
 Who held her forth as pattern of her sex,
 Lauding her virtues in such boasting strain?
 Two wreaths of triumph glitter on your brow,
 Why shrink you trembling from the third away?
 Say, what the fancy which obscures your sense,
 And turns you back from certain victory?

PERCIVAL.

Lie not her tears—the woes that I have heaped
 Upon her innocent, devoted head,
 Already far too heavy on my soul?—
 Enough! I tell thee plainly, I repent

All that I've done, and had resolved to do,
Nor further will pursue my present course.

GINEVRA.

It was agreed, and you consented to it,
'That, deep as you might wound Griselda's soul,
Her feelings tow'rds you should remain the same —
Her glowing love should not to hatred turn —
To bitterness her pious resignation;
But that she should e'en closer cling to thee
In mis'ry, than she did in bride's embrace.

(To the courtiers.)

Say, was't not so? ye were the witnesses.

GAVIN.

So spak'st thou, Queen.

ORIANA.

Yes, such were the conditions.

GINEVRA.

We doubt not that Griselda's stedfast soul
Maintain its love e'en in adversity.
The will to do is hers, and to believe
The will is ours; but still a something fails —
The *proof*;— one struggle more, and it is there.
Think not, I wish to force you to compliance;
But if you now repent the compact made —
If Pity in your bosom master Pride,
Content you to do penance for your humour,
And kneel, Sir Knight, before your victor's feet.

PERCIVAL.

I, kneel to thee?

ORIANA.

Now tell me, Percival!

You undertook this contest willingly,
Then why should doubts now rise to blench your cheek?
You thought mayhap, Sir Knight, your wife would smile,
When from her arms you tore her only child!
And when you banished her from this your castle,
That she would leave it with the same composure,
As if she went to see a neighb'ring friend!

PERCIVAL

(aside.)

Oh, would that I had thought so! Then, my crime
Had been but rash and irreflective folly.
I foresaw ev'ry tear that she would shed,
And told each sigh that would escape her bosom.

ORIANA.

And fairly weighed, Sir Knight, to what amount
The proofs already by Griselda given?
She gave her child, because it else were taken;
And, when she left you, yielded but to force;
'The actual proof, methinks, is yet to come.
It will but dim Griselda's excellence,
Should ill-timed pity palsy now your courage.
This plea's too poor to serve you for escape.

PERCIVAL.

Accursed net that I have spun around me!
I must indeed fulfil what I've begun.

GINEVRA.

Decide, Sir Percival, redeem your word.
Kneel at my feet, and own yourself subdued,
Or hasten to Griselda, and from her
Entreat, as outlawed fugitive, protection;
If the divorced one do concede your prayer,
And, bidding stern defiance to our threats,
Her head, her life for you consent to venture;
Then are you victor, and the peasant girl
Sees England's Mistress kneeling at her feet.

TRISTRAM.

Nay, gracious Lady, stretch not, I entreat,
The tightened bow-string to its last extreme!
And canst thou, Percival, a moment hesitate?
Look back and shudder, with thy heart consult —
Thou holdest in thy hands her weal or woe!
As love or pride prevails, 'tis life or death!
And can a doubt remain then how to choose?
Griselda is the price — kneel, Percival!

LANCELOT

(*to Ginevra.*)

Prolong no more her hours of agony,
Ginevra, let Griselda's sufferings move thee!

GINEVRA.

Griselda's fate lies in her husband's hands;
 He can on war — he can on peace resolve.
 Decide, Sir Percival!

ORIANA.

Why hesitate?

Obeys the impulse of your penitence;
 Come, kneel you down and beg Ginevra's pardon!
 Nor fear, Sir Knight, to hurt those tender knees —
 You shall have softest eider-down to kneel on!
 'Tis easier to do penance than you think.
 Fear not us witnesses, we will not blab —
 Scarce whisper even to our bosom-friend —
 How Percival before Ginevra knelt.

PERCIVAL

(with fixed and gloomy look, after a pause.)

I have done outrage to the truest heart,
 And revelled in its mortal agony;
 And, conscious of the deepness of my guilt,
 I fain would now avert from her the blow,
 Which plighted word and duty bid me strike —
 But 'tis too late, I must fill up the measure.

(To Ginevra.)

I am prepared to recommence the contest —
 To-day — this very hour I will renew it.

GINEVRA.

Proceed, Sir Percival, we follow you.
 Brave Sirs, we beg that you too will attend,
 And mark whose scale shall sink, and whose ascend.

(Exit with Oriána, Percival, Lancelot, Gavin etc.)

TRISTRAM.

Lead on! — Unhappy one! the hardest lot
That love can suffer has befallen thee;
The very lips that idolize insult thee,
And the same hand which cherishes destroys!
(Exit.)

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT FOURTH.

SCENE FIRST.

A mountain forest; in the background Cedric's cottage, on the banks of a torrent, and deeply buried in trees.

Cedric is led forward by a Boy.

CEDRIC.

Hast heard aright, and can I credit thee? *
Her child delivered into Arthur's hands?

BOY.

So said I.

CEDRIC.

And the holy marriage tie
Dissolved in virtue of the King's decree?

BOY.

Yes, Cedric, yes!

CEDRIC.

And she with shame cast forth
In open court, before the assembled Knights?

BOY.

E'en as I told it thee, so fell it out;
And ev'ry lip cries shame on Percival
And Arthur.

* Vid. Note 12.

CEDRIC.

Words! mere words and empty sound!
 In proud position stands the Lord of Wales,
 His haughty head nigh reaching to the clouds,
 And, ere the uttered curse attain so high,
 Its pois'nous breath, in Flattery's alembic,
 Has been to sweetest fragrancý transmuted,
 And balsams out of maledictions brewed.
 The Lord of Wales and a poor collier! — Master
 And slave! Yet both created from one dust,
 Peasant as Prince — both children of the God
 Who dwells in yonder Heav'n! — What heardst thou more?

BOY.

Wheree'er I went, sad plainings met my ear; *
 Loud wept the poor, and earnestly the sick
 Called for their kind physician, ev'ry mouth
 Resounded with Griselda's praise, and bore
 Its witness to the undeserved requital,
 Which paid her blessings back with misery.

CEDRIC.

We mortals ever judge from empty show;
 But God's eye dives into our soul; the hand
 May gentle be and lavish of its gifts —
 May clothe the naked and may tend the sick,
 But where pride nestles in a daughter's heart,
 And haughtiness struts close to piety,
 There strikes not undeserved the bolt of Heav'n!

* Víd. Note 13

BOY.

How! — Speakest thou against thy flesh and blood?

CEDRIC.

I hew my hand off if it should offend me,
 And, if my pulses' current flow too fast,
 I cause a vein be opened for my cure.
 Oh, there is bad and black fermenting blood! —
 Enough, enough! — Thou art too young for this!
 Come, boy, conduct me to the moss-seat yonder
 By the old oak.

BOY.

This way, my poor, blind Cedric!
 Here sit and take thy rest!

CEDRIC

(seating himself on the bank.)

Oh, flight of days!

Still halting Mem'ry follows thee with sighs!
 Here sat she oft in ev'ning's stillest hour
 Close by my side, and wound herself with sweet
 Caresses to my arms — here would she prattle —
 And sing — thou know'st the song — come sing it, boy!
 How was't? — “A Knight there came” — No, that's not it —
 “A Knight, perchance, espied a rose,
 “Which bloomed in forest green,
 “And, straight, with eagerness he glows
 “To wear its damask sheen.”
 So it began — then sing it, boy! — no, no!
 Thou shalt not sing it — 'tis a hateful lay!

A cross-grained ballad! — No, I will not hear
How the Knight robbed me of my little rose.

BOY.

Come, Cedric, to thy hut, and take thy rest!

CEDRIC.

I could have borne the blow, if she had died; —
Alone I should have been, but not forsaken —
No child to love me, but disowned by none.
How willing would I bear upon my shoulders
All earthly evils, were I spared but this —
'The worst of all, for from my child it comes —
The burden of that child's ingratitude.
But, hark! — who comes?

BOY.

The wind sweeps through the
leaves!

CEDRIC.

No! footsteps — there are footsteps! — They approach!
She comes in evil hour, if now she come!

BOY.

A female totters tow'rds us from the wood!

SCENE SECOND.

Griselda appears in the back-ground.

CEDRIC.

And dost thou know her, boy? Quick! say, who is she?

BOY.

She's here, so ask herself!

CEDRIC.

Who art thou? Speak!

GRISELDA

(throwing herself at his feet.)

Thy child, my father, thy deserted child!

CEDRIC.

My child? — Have I a child? — Here, tell me, boy!
Have I a child? — My heart knows not of such,
And Mem'ry tells me that I childless am.

BOY.

Touch but her cheek, and thou wilt recognize her!
It is thy child — Griselda speaks to thee.

CEDRIC

(feeling Griselda's dress.)

You are Griselda — Lady of Sir Percival?
Ah, noble Madam, let me kiss your hand!
How's this? an apron and a woollen gown
You wear? — No tissue robe — no silk attire?
Such humble garb suits not your dignity!
Where have you left your train of Knights and Ladies?
And where your menial crew? — Bring mats here, quick!
The morning dew will wet the lady's feet!

GRISELDA.

I lie, a fleeing exile, at thy feet,
Divorced from home and from my husband's bed,
Robbed of my child, the offspring of our love.

Oh, pour not biting scorn into my wounds,
My honoured father, for thou tear'st my heart!

CEDRIC.

Yes, honied words can stream forth from thy mouth,
But steel, to sev'n degrees of hardness tempered
And beaten on the anvil, is thy heart —
Thy trait'rous, lying, and ungrateful heart!

GRISELDA.

By the great God enthroned in yonder clouds!
Thou layest to my charge a crime I know not.
My heart disclaims ingratitude and falsehood,

CEDRIC.

Oh, thou art all unconscious of a fault,
And shakest off, like rain-drops, my reproaches!
Come, then, and give account of this thy love —
The kindness, constancy which thou hast shown me.
What didst thou — speak, thou tender-hearted child! —
When Percival expelled me from his castle,
Because I braved his anger with my pray'rs,
Unjustly roused against the innocent?
What didst thou for thy poor blind father then?

GRISELDA.

I wept, my father!

CEDRIC.

Are thy tears then pearls,
That thou dost set a higher price on them,
'Then on the plain and boldly spoken word,

Which, as a wife, no less than as a daughter,
Thou shouldst have spoken for thy injured parent.

GRISELDA.

Make not thy child atone her husband's guilt;
It was my duty to obey my Lord.

CEDRIC.

I blame not thy obedience, but thy silence!
'Twas not as Lord thou honour'dst Percival,
As husband, or as father of thy child,
But, as an idol, didst thou worship him;
'Mid clouds of light, with ray-encircled head,
Thou saw'st him — not as mortal, child of dust!
Oh dulness, which thus makes itself a foot-stool
For pow'r and dignity to tread upon!
Oh servile spirit, which could lead thee thus
To spurn thy flesh and blood, thou art rewarded!
His spouse thou wert not, but his paramour,
And like a serving-wench he has dismissed thee!

GRISELDA.

Angels of God! Look down from Heav'n and see
The gross injustice which I'm doomed to bear!
Was't not enough to lose my ev'ry joy?
Why still these curses on my guiltless head?

CEDRIC.

Thou askest, why! — Then listen, while I tell thee!
Three days my wife — thy mother — yonder lay —
Three days she yonder lay, and could not die,

For yearnings after her belovéd child
 Retained her spirit in its earthly bouds.
 Her latest aspiration was a blessing;
 But as thou cam'st not to receive it from her,
 So lurking Satan stole it from her lips'
 Pale confines, changed it to a fiery bolt,
 And hurled it, as a curse, against thy soul!
 The curse of pride and of ingratitude!

GRISELDA.

I call the everlasting God to witness,
 Ingratitude has never stained my heart!
 He knows my suff'ring, when the hand of death
 Lay heavy on my husband and my mother;
 My care as wife he claimed, as daughter she,
 To soothe the fearful agonies of death;
 But by my vow, *his* only could I be,
 And 'twas my duty to fulfil the vow;
 First must I save a father to my child,
 Before I dare a mother's death-bed soothe.

CEDRIC.

Thou speakest of thy infant child — my grandson;
 Say, if thou hast protected him as mother!
 If thou hast loved him as thy mother thee!
 Hast thou defended him with life and blood?
 Or hast thou not betrayed and sold the boy,
 And giv'n him to the King's Commissioners?
 The forest creature battles for its young!
 The fox must strangle first the timid fowl,

Before he take her chick ; but thou — but thou —
 Scarce was a hair upon thy head disturbed,
 And scarce a fold of thy apparel ruffled ;
 Without a pang — nay, with a smile — thou gav'st him.

GRISELDA.

Love gave the child, and Love restored the gift !
 The father's life — the husband's — was at stake,
 How could I hesitate — or how resist ?

CEDRIC.

Enough of empty words ! — For Percival,
 And for a glitt'ring title thou forgott'st
 A daughter's duty, and a mother's love,
 Nor felt'st the outrage done thy poor blind father.
 But God is just ! His seeing eye selects
 The idol of thy worship for thy scourge ;
 And makes thy fate depend upon my pity,
 Whom thou forgottest while in fortune's lap.

GRISELDA.

My father, hear me !

CEDRIC.

No, I will not hear thee !
 Come, my boy, come ! conduct me to my hut !
 But mark thou what I say : a shelt'ring roof
 My house denies not to the fugitive,
 Thou too mayst use it — Yonder lies the threshold ! —
 My door is open, but my arms are not.
 Eat , drink, enjoy my hospitality ;

But never shall thy arm support my steps;
 Thine eyes shall never read my soul's emotions.
 Thou *wert* my daughter — *now*, thou art my guest!

GRISELDA.

My father, hear me!

CEDRIC.

No, I will not hear thee!
 Facts speak too plain, thy words shall not befool me.
 (*Exit Cedric leaning on the boy.*)

GRISELDA.

Then do ye hear my complaints, ye clouds of Heaven!
 And thou all-seeing golden beam of day —
 Thou eye of God, look down upon me here!
 Creator, throned in light — a kinder father —
 Thou know'st my heart and thou hast proved my soul!
 'Thou saw'st the agony which tore my breast,
 When at the brink of death I knew my mother,
 And saw, before mine eyes, my husband dying!
 No sinful pride my feelings had empoisoned,
 No pomp or empty glare my sense perverted.
 If now for crime I suffer, tell me, Lord!
 For what my fellow-men condemn as error,
 Is love — love only! Crime it cannot be!

(*After a pause, with more composure.*)

The spring of life for me is past for ever,
 The bright sun of my happiness is sunk!
 But, even should a midnight gloom surround me,
 There still remains unset my star of love! —
 Our hands they tore asunder, not our hearts!

Each tear which trickles down my glowing cheek,
 May find on Percival's a sister pearl;
 The sighs, which 'scape my miserable breast,
 Encounter his amid yon sea of clouds.
 Up! arm thyself with courage, bruised soul!
 Yield not to dreams of dark despondency,
 Thou art not wretched, for thou art beloved.
 Deep in thy bosom let thy grief lie chained,
 And would its heavings burst the band in twain,
 And vent themselves in plainings on thy lips,
 Then, think thou art beloved — mayst love again,
 And upwards — upwards, let thy look be turned!

*(She sinks exhausted on the moss-seat; after a short pause,
 Percival and Gavin appear in the back-ground of the stage.)*

SCENE THIRD.

Enter Percival and Gavin.

PERCIVAL.

Oh, that my plighted word should force this contest!
 That I, to gratify my soul's desire
 To revel in her love's exuberance,
 Should sacrifice her happiness and mine!
 Oh, were it not for this vain phantom, Honour,
 I would say: No! — despite assembled England! —
 We've reached the place appointed. Comes the Queen

GAVIN.

She waits our signal in the grove hard by,
 And yonder in the shade reclines Griselda!

PERCIVAL.

'Tis she indeed — now hide you in the thicket,
And witness how I quit me of my promise.

(*Exit Garin.*)

GRISELDA

(*in deep thought, speaks to herself*)

"Ah, fade not here," thus spake the Knight,

"Sweet rose, in forest gloom!

But let me take thy beauties bright

To wear for bonnet plume.

No! — I will bloom upon thy heart,

But on thy bonnet, never!"

(*sees Percival and starts suddenly up.*)

My Percival!

PERCIVAL.

'Tis I indeed, — dost flee me?

GRISELDA.

'Tis thou! — Yes, thou indeed! Thou standest there
In living, blooming, bright reality!

No wan-like spectre of the memory —

No cheating offspring of some bright-hued dream,

But thou art Percival *indeed*! thy lips

Vibrate with words, with life thy bosom heaves!

I see thy kindling eye — thy glowing cheek,

And with these arms I may encircle thee,

Nor melts thy cherished image into air.

PERCIVAL.

Griselda!

GRISELDA.

Percival! All's well again,
 And the deep ocean of Forgetfulness
 Bears on its swelling waves my griefs away;
 Mine thou art, mine! Oh, how my bosom warms,
 My husband and my Lord, in thy dear arms!

PERCIVAL.

Oh, would I were your husband and your Lord!

GRISELDA.

What say'st thou? How?— Oh, frenzy of my soul
 Which blends reality with empty dreams!
 My erring reason, learn to judge aright,
 And separate what has been from what is!

PERCIVAL

(to himself.)

Steel thee, my heart— bear up against her tears!

GRISELDA.

My noble Lord! I know thou hast forgiv'n
 The blind tumultuous feelings which deceived me;
 My fate now clearly stands before my soul,
 And well do I thy mercy recognize;
 'Twas to console me that thou sought'st me out—
 With gentle words to drop the oil of pity,
 And shed a balsam on my wounded breast.
 For this, accept my thanks!

PERCIVAL.

Hear me, Griselda!

Compassion led me not to seek this meeting,
 For know, a day of reckoning has dawned,
 And that I share the fate befallen thee!
 The King has laid high treason to my charge;
 I am proscribed, and stript of my possessions;
 Pursued — the outlaw's brand upon my brow —
 I wander here with tracker on my heel —
 The Headsman's gripe already on my neck.

GRISELDA.

Proscribed and fugitive! Thy head in danger!
 Thy precious head! And must I live to see it?
 And yet thou linger'st here? — Thou dar'st delay,
 When life and liberty are both at stake?
 Flee, flee!

PERCIVAL.

In vain! — Beset is ev'ry path,
 No means of safety or escape remain!

GRISELDA.

Fountain of Grace, do thou enlighten me!
 Help me to save him, mighty Lord of all!

PERCIVAL.

What! wouldst thou save the man who gave the king
 Thy child? — The man, who rudely cast thee forth,
 And robbed thee of thy life's best ornaments?

GRISELDA.

Was it thy will, then, to afflict my heart?
Is this a time to think upon my fate,
While thine hangs trembling on the abyss's edge?
No! If an army were opposed to thee,
Save thee I must, and, by God's help, I will!

PERCIVAL.

Cease from the vain attempt—'twill cost thy life;
My fate will only overwhelm us both!

GRISELDA.

Oh, speak'st thou truly?— And will this poor life
Be ta'en for thine? and may I die to save thee?
Dissevered is the tie which made us one,
Yet still this heart is thine;— no more indeed
May it repose exultingly on thine,
And melt in sweet delight upon thy breast—
No more its secret depths to thee disclose,
But it retains the right to break for thee!

PERCIVAL.

Cease, cease! Fate summons me, I must obey!—
See, arms are glancing yonder from the thicket!

GRISELDA

(hastily.)

'Tis arms, indeed! Away! oh, quick away!
Pity my anguish!— Flee, conceal thyself!—
Thou know'st the cave with ivy overgrown,
Which deep within the forest lies concealed—
My secret hiding-place in childhood's days,

And only to my husband since confided.
 Go, hide thyself amidst its rocky clefts!
 Oh, if thou wouldst not see me at thy feet
 Expire, fly, Percival! 'Thou'rt there secure!

PERCIVAL

(pressing Griselda vehemently to his breast.)

Griselda! Angel! Saviour!

GRISELDA.

Fly, oh fly!

(Percival hurries off; Griselda gazes after him, till he vanishes in the thicket, then sinks on her knees, with her hands raised imploringly to heaven.)

Save him, oh Lord! take me for sacrifice!

SCENE FOURTH.

Ginevra appears in the back-ground with Oriana, Lancelot, Gavin etc. Griselda rises hastily.

GINEVRA.

'This way he came, quick, follow on his track,
 Search ev'ry bush, patrol the river side!
 Gavin, do you examine yonder cottage!
 Find him we must—away!

(Exit Gavin with guards.)

(To Griselda.)

But hearken, thou!

What of him? Speak, he must have passed thee close!
 Say, which way went he? Where is he concealed?

GRISELDA.

Whom seek'st thou, Queen?

GINEVRA.

Woman, thou cheat'st me not
With this assumption of simplicity.
I know thee well, as thou, it seems, know'st me;
Thou art Griselda, wife of Percival!
We now pursue the trait'rous fugitive;
Inform us where he has concealed himself!

GRISELDA.

I, Lady?

GINEVRA.

Yes! He must have passed thee close,
Thou know'st which way he fled!

GRISELDA.

And if I knew —
I am Griselda — wife of Percival!

GINEVRA.

Traitress, thou hast concealed his guilty head!
I know thou hast — deny it not — I saw thee.

GRISELDA.

God saw me too, and with his clouds conceals
All traces of the fugitive! His Angels
Guard him, but shroud his foes in darkest night!

GINEVRA.

Bid not defiance to our pow'r, Griselda!
 Nor venture with thy Sovereign to strive!
 Behold, on ev'ry side our net is spread!
 Thy silence brings no safety to thy husband,
 But dooms thy head to fall upon the scaffold;
 For if, before a minute is expired,
 He be not placed within our hands — thou diest!

GRISELDA.

Here is my life! Take it!

GINEVRA

(aside to her attendants.)

Eternal God!

Is this the woman, who, without resistance —
 Submissive as a maid to master's nod —
 Gave up her infant child and left her home?

LANCELOT.

Thy efforts are in vain! Cease, cease, Ginevra!
 A loving heart knows not the fear of death.

GINEVRA.

A gallant spirit dwells within this woman,
 Which rends the airy fabric of my hope.

(To Oriana.)

Speak thou to her, and seek to move her soul!

ORIANA.

Listen, Griselda! Has not Percival
 Delivered up thy infant to the King?

And sent thee forth in helpless poverty,
 That he might seek a bride of nobler race?
 Has he not torn thee down from fortune's summit,
 To which in giddy haste himself had raised thee,
 And crushed thee into atoms by the fall?
 Did he not so?

GRISELDA.

He has done all thou say'st!

ORIANA.

For *love* thou mightst make ev'ry sacrifice,
 For *love* o'ercome e'en death's last agony;
 But is it *love* that Percival has shown thee?
 Now Fortune places him at thy disposal,
 Wilt thou not take *his* life, who took thine All?

GRISELDA.

Oh, mete not Love with such a niggard measure!—
 What then were Love if it returned no more
 Than what itself received? No more could bear
 Than what itself imposed? Stood it not forth,
 A stedfast rock amid the tempest's strife?—
 If, in misfortune's hour, Love were not firm
 And true—Hope's last resource—Oh, what were Love?—
 I basked beneath the noon-day of his honours,
 And shall their night induce me to desert him?—

LANCELOT.

Her soul is like the azure vault of Heaven,
 And 'mid the blessed mansions of its glory,
 Her thoughts, like light-encircled angels, dwell!

GINEVRA.

Bring hither chains, and manacle her hands!
 Speak thy last pray'r, thy life draws near its end!

GRISELDA.

I come, my Father! take this worthless life!
 But let my soul, from out its mould'ring dust,
 Soar back to Thee—the Fount from whence it sprung!
 And, should some stains of earth still cling to it,
 Thou knowest what its humble strivings were,
 And, like a gracious Father, wilt receive it.—
 Much—much I loved, and much will be forgiven!

LANCELOT.

In vain Deception spreads its snares around her,
 Love watches still to warn her faithful heart.

GINEVRA.

A magic tone breathes in her ev'ry word,
 Which moves my trembling soul to tenderness!

(*To Oriana.*)

The day is his! We cannot shake this heart!

SCENE FIFTH.

To these enter Gavin and guards, who lead in Cedric from the cottage.

GAVIN.

Thy orders have been executed, Queen.
This blind man only found we in the hut,
And him thou canst thyself interrogate!

GRISELDA.

My father! — Blesséd God! My poor blind father!

GINEVRA.

Her father, says she? All is not yet lost!

(To Griselda.)

Behold! — Delay no longer to confess!
He shares thy fate! — Wouldst see thy father die?

GRISELDA

(kneeling.)

Oh Lady, spare his silver hairs! grant him
The short remainder of his fleeting years,
Till God's good Angel touch his darkened eyes,
And bear him upwards to eternal light.

LANCELOT.

Oh, cease to torture her! Ginevra, cease!

GRISELDA

(in deepest emotion.)

Let pitying grace and mercy now prevail!
Nor threaten more his faded, feeble life!
Lead me to instant death, but pardon him!

GINEVRA.

Speak, and he lives! — Thy silence seals his doom!

GRISELDA

(in tones of deepest agony.)

Then, Angels, guard him! For I must be silent.

(swoons.)

GAVIN.

She faints!

LANCELOT

Support her!

CEDRIC.

Say, what has befallen?

A loud confusion strikes upon my ear;

Would I could tear my eyes' dark veil away!

GINEVRA.

Away with her! — We're vanquished, Oriana.

Tho' with a blush, yet I must needs confess

That I have seen the truest wife in England.

Away with her! and lead her father too

Unto Pendennys! — Oh, my cheek's on fire!

Must I then kneel before the collier's daughter?

Hide me, eternal Pow'rs of darkest night!

CEDRIC

(while he is led away.)

Oh, when will Mercy dwell along with Might?

END OF ACT FOURTH.

ACT FIFTH.

SCENE FIRST.

A hall in Pendennys Castle with a Throne on a raised platform. Ronald and Servants are busy laying carpets and adorning the hall with flowers and other festive decorations.

RONALD.

Bestir yourselves, this is no holiday!
Unfold the splendour of this purple carpet
Before King Arthur's throne!

FIRST SERVANT.

King Arthur's throne?

RONALD.

Why so amazed? Why open'st thou so wide
That gaping cavern of a mouth? — Didst thou
Not see the King arrive upon his charger?

SERVANT.

Mean you the hunter in the plain green coat?
Was that the King?

RONALD.

Fool! Think'st thou that the King
Puts on his crown when he goes out a-hunting?—
Here! lay another carpet for the Queen!

SECOND SERVANT.

Mean you the handsome lady, dressed in scarlet,
Who rode so proudly on the milk-white palfrey?

RONALD.

What prates the ninny there of milk-white palfreys —
Of handsome ladies and their scarlet dress?
Art thou the man to dare to raise thine eyes,
If Queens should, peradventure, pass before thee?—
More garlands still! More garlands here, I say!
Hang them on yonder wall! Adorn the hall,
Till like a grove in May it looks, and all
Be filled with fragrancy and bridal splendour.

THIRD SERVANT.

Is't possible? and thinks my Lord so soon
Again to marry?

RONALD.

Art thou blind, thou fool?
Didst thou not see our Lady, then, return?
And is it not her breath which now enlivens
Pendennys' proudly decorated halls?
Is not Griselda once again our mistress?—

SERVANT.

Returned she is indeed, but it was chained
To her old father's side that she arrived.

RONALD.

Dull-pated crew! Can you then only seize
 What drops into your hands? No difference
 Discern 'tween outward show and innate worth—
 'Tween man and what he wears—'tween shell and kernel?
 Here! hang more garlands on the walls, I say!
 Spare not the verdant promise of the grove!
 Oh, were my tongue not fettered by a vow,
 Loud would you now exult, and shout for joy,
 Till Heav'n's high arches echoed with the sound!

FIRST SERVANT.

What know'st thou? Speak!

SECOND SERVANT.

Ah, let us hear thy secret!

RONALD.

What, tell tales out of school? No, no, my friends!
 More garlands here, I say! Arrange the tables!
 Off to the kitchen!—To the cellar haste!
 Away!—This festival can ne'er return!

SCENE SECOND.

Enter Lancelot and Gavin. Ronald and servants slowly retire.

GAVIN.

What! would you leave us then, Sir Knight? Forsake
 At once the Queen's good graces, and the Court?

LANCELOT.

My heart has undergone a wondrous change,
 And I awake as from a troubled dream.
 Much have I lived to learn in these few days.
 Burst are the chains which held me, and I feel,
 That beauty 's not the first of woman's charms,
 Nor sparkling wit best treasure of her soul.
 No spots can I upon my sun endure,
 No stains upon the mirror of my honour.
 Farewell! We meet again!

GAVIN.

Sir Lancelot,
 Griselda's woes have wrapped your soul in gloom;
 But now the measure of her grief's exhausted,
 Remain, and celebrate her victory!

LANCELOT.

These walls, indeed, are decked with festive pomp,
 And round these columns blooming garlands cling;
 But much I fear her heart's deep sentiments
 Will not so soon assume the hues of joy!
 Sir Gavin, fare thee well! I must away!

GAVIN.

The Queen, Sir Knight, will deeply mourn thy absence!

LANCELOT.

Mayhap! — but time will teach her to forget! —
 My steed stands in the court caparisoned,

And soon the ocean bears me back to France. —
 Gavin, conceal not from her why I go!
 And should again arise within her breast
 Those evil demons — Pride and Arrogance,
 Then let her think on Lancelot and Griselda.

(*Exit.*)

GAVIN.

He's gone — and faith! it will be no great harm,
 If tears for once should find themselves as guests
 In Queen Ginevra's dark and glowing eyes.

SCENE THIRD.

Gavin, Percival and Tristram.

PERCIVAL.

At length the burden of deceit's removed —
 The bands are burst which held my heart enchained —
 The day of compensation has arrived
 Which crowns her well-tried constancy with glory!
 Oh, words are far too poor to tell her virtues!
 Here I forswear the errors of my youth,
 And like the azure sky immeasurable
 Shall be my love! — Oh, it shall float around her
 A sea of joy, an atmosphere of light!
 Henceforth such tears alone shall dim her eyes,
 As for the rose, by storms laid low, are shed;
 And, if the depths of anguish she has sounded,
 She shall forget them on the heights of joy!

TRISTRAM.

Success attend your efforts, Percival!
 May Time bring healing as he onward flies,
 And scatter from his coloured wings refreshment!
 But much I fear her wounds have been too deep
 To heal, and leave no scar upon her heart!

PERCIVAL.

Oh, let me on love's mighty magic build—
 Let me undoubting in that heart confide
 Which clings in stedfast constancy to mine!
 Grief pierces deep, but joy is mightier still.
 Oh, when she takes her infant to her bosom,
 And feels the glow of my encircling arm,
 The rose will bloom again upon her cheek,
 And peace become the inmate of her heart.
 Will not her praise resound from ev'ry lip?
 Will't not be echoed in the minstrel's lay,
 And vibrate to remote posterity?
 I will exalt her to my patron saint—
 Atone my error by a life's devotion,
 And, as the changing moon its light renews,
 So ever varying pleasures shall surround her!
 She loves me, Tristram, and she will forgive!—
 But say, Sir Gavin, what delays the Queen?
 She gave her promise, when will she perform it?

GAVIN.

As colours vary on the blushing cheek,
 So strives for mast'ry in her vanquished soul

Duty with shame, with weakness resolution.
 Her wav'ring purpose breeds a mortal sickness; *
 For strength she struggles, and, as drowning men
 Will catch at straws, she seeks some word to 'scape
 The whirlpool of her thoughts, but sinks the deeper.

PERCIVAL.

She pledged her word, and will she not perform it?

GAVIN.

She will — and she will not. This victory
 Has moved the inmost feelings of her soul.
 She owns, tho' blushing, all Griselda's worth,
 And at her feet, if unconstrained, would kneel;
 But brooks not, on compulsion, to obey
 The dictates of her heart, — yet still she must;
 For Arthur urges on her word's fulfilment,
 Nor do entreaties from his lips proceed,
 But tones of stern command, and, as I left her,
 She wisely seemed resolved to yield to fate;
 And yonder see, Sir Percival, they come!

PERCIVAL.

'Tis her indeed! — Are all my men assembled?

GAVIN.

They are, Sir Percival.

PERCIVAL.

And have you, Tristram,
 Brought back my infant boy into the castle?

* Vid. Note 14.

TRISTRAM.

I have committed him to Ronald's arms.

PERCIVAL.

All then is well! My soul breathes free again,
And life's best hour is now about to strike.

SCENE FOURTH.

Flourish of trumpets behind the scenes. Enter Arthur and Ginevra in their robes of state; Oriana, Knights, Ladies, Percival's retainers in their train, and all in festive procession.

ARTHUR.

Right hospitably, Percival, Pendennys
Hath entertained us in its ample halls;
Yet still we must, without reserve, confess,
That we were led to step across its threshold
Less by the wish to greet thee in thy home,
Than to appease this hateful rivalry
Which sets at issue Majesty and Merit —
To ward from quiet worth a bitter trial —
And love from misuse of its pow'r protect.
But we have learnt — with deepest sorrow learnt —
That ev'ry sacrifice, which pride required
And stern defiance vowed, has been performed.

PERCIVAL.

'Tis as thou say'st, my gracious Sovereign!
The sacrifice is made — the vict'ry won,
Nor rashly was the strife by me begun.

I have led home this pearl of womankind;
 My promise has been kept, accomplish thine!
 Let now the wreath, through grievous struggles gained,
 With verdant honours deck Griselda's head,
 And at her feet thy Queen — Ginevra — kneel.

ARTHUR.

There stands she, speak to her!

GINEVRA.

My Lord and husband!

A royal word was pledged to Percival,
 And royally Ginevra will perform it.

ARTHUR.

Then wherefore tarry we? The hours fly fast!
 Let us award the palm of victory!
 Go, summon Cedric and Griselda hither!

(Aside to Ginevra.)

Ginevra, if to-day our throne's abasement
 Should leave some stains upon its occupier,
 We must regard our fate as well deserved;
 Not that we share thy error, but because
 We, thoughtless, took no measures to prevent it.

*(Arthur and Ginevra seat themselves on the throne. Percival
 retires amongst his vassals.)*

SCENE FIFTH.

Griselda enters clad in homely garb, and leading Cedric.

CEDRIC.

Griselda, tell me! is it to the death
Thou guid'st me?

ARTHUR.

Fear not to advance, old man!
Thy Lord and Sovereign addresses thee.
Griselda, wonder not that these same walls,
On which so late thou turn'dst thy back as exile,
Should glitter round thee now in festive state.
Their pomp is meant to honour thy return;
Oh, may it teem for thee with happiness!

GRISELDA.

What say you, Sire? Oh, can I credit you?
Hope struggles hard with fear within my soul,
And all my thoughts whirl round in strange confusion.
Is then the ban removed from Percival?
The hate extinguished which inflamed your breast?
And is't for me these walls are decorated?

ARTHUR.

By England's throne, I tell thee but the truth!

GRISELDA.

The word of peace now vibrates from thy lips,
Not anger's thunder, nor the cry of rage;

And the exalted lady at thy side
 No longer hurls on me her light'ning glance,
 But a soft smile irradiates her features.
 Oh, if 'tis true what thou announcest to me,
 Look on me now a suppliant at thy feet,
 And turn a gracious ear to my entreaty!

CEDRIC.

Entreat them not! — They're deaf to all entreaty!

ARTHUR.

Griselda, rise! nor speak in such a posture!
 Whate'er may be thy pray'r, I grant it thee,
 And thou shalt ever find in me protection.

GRISELDA.

Nought for myself I ask, my Sovereign;
 To plead for Percival I stand before thee.
 Oh, let the spring-like glories of thy grace,
 In all their former brightness, deck his brow!
 Place power and honours in his hand again —
 In *his* hand — not in mine — my Sovereign!
 For well I know my small deserts, my place
 Was never in this proud and lordly castle.

CEDRIC.

And therefore, fool, thou wert cast forth from it.

ARTHUR.

Griselda, shame would prompt us to conceal
 What, for thy peace, must now be brought to light.

Then know, thou'rt dupe of empty counterfeit;
 We tore not from thine arms thy infant boy —
 No will of ours dissolved thy marriage tie,
 No perils ever menaced Percival;
 Thou fearedst dangers which existed not,
 And thou didst tremble for a very shadow.

GRISELDA.

How say you? Empty counterfeit! — and shadow!
 My boy — my Percival — a counterfeit!
 The pangs of bitter agony I suffered —
 Pangs, which the very life they wasted fed —
 All counterfeit! — Dispel the darkness round me!
 My spirit thirsteth for the light of truth.

CEDRIC.

What! have we been but sport for vain caprice?

ORIANA.

One word, Griselda, will reveal the riddle,
 And ev'ry bandage from thine eyes remove.
 All thou hast seen is but a Shrovetide * Mask
 Which Percival — the rogue — would play with thee;
 Mere mummary — a wager, the occasion —
 The prize, a Queen's prostration at thy feet;
 Thy tears were counted nothing in the bargain.
 Thy Lord would prove that thou, tho' peasant's child,
 Wert worthy of the rank to which he raised thee,
 And sullied not the pure blood of his race.

* Vid. Note 15.

CEDRIC.

And therefore — therefore, wanton arrogance!
 You've steeped her heart in tears of bitterness!

*(Percival presses forward from the crowd, and throws himself
 at Griselda's feet.)*

PERCIVAL

(in tones of entreaty.)

Art angry with me, loved one? Oh, forgive!
 Erase from off the tablets of thy mind
 The sad memorials of thy suffering;
 Vouchsafe one beaming look of sweet forgiveness,
 And in exhaustless love's profound abyss
 Be sunk all recollection of my fault.

GRISELDA

*(steps back, and remains a few moments with her eyes expres-
 sively fixed on Percival, then speaks, as if awakening from
 a trance.)*

A Shrovetide Mask! — Speak thou, and let me hear
 The truth from thy lips, Percival! Oh, say,
 Is this a game and but to prove me played?

PERCIVAL

(after a short pause.)

'Tis even as thou sayest. But 'tis past!
 Thy child in safety, and thy father free,
 And all thy happiness restored to thee.
 Griselda, pardon me, nor longer brood
 On what has only proved thy worth — 'tis past!
 Then let it be forgiven and forgot!

GRISELDA.

A game! and I! —————

(She presses her hand violently on her heart, remains some moments, half turned away, in deep and silent emotion, then proceeds.)

A hard and tearful game!

PERCIVAL.

Thou weep'st! oh, let me wipe away thy tears!
 They would deride my choice of thee, because
 Thou wert the forest child, and poverty
 The frame which held the picture of thy beauty.
 But 'gainst the glitter of their lofty names
 I set thy pure affections and thy mind.
 Through pain, indeed, I led thee to the goal,
 But victor hast thou been in ev'ry trial.
 Ginevra kneels before thee in the dust,
 And England will re-echo with thy praise.
 Wilt thou then blame me for a fame like this?

GINEVRA

(who has, meanwhile, descended with Arthur from the throne.)

He speaketh truly; we confess, Griselda,
 A portion of his crime pertains to us.
 We first devised what he brought to perfection,
 Vict'ry is thine, to us belongs repentance.
 True to our word, we freely do acknowledge,
 Before the assembled chivalry of England,
 That near thy virtues pales our kingly crown,
 And if it went on earth by right and merit,
 Thou shouldst be Queen and wear our diadem.

And here, Griselda, at thy feet I kneel;
 Forgive the wrongs my sinful pride has done thee.

PERCIVAL

(with elated and joyful voice.)

She kneels! — Proclaim it to the winds of Heav'n,
 The Queen is prostrate 'fore the collier's daughter!

GRISELDA.

Oh, Madam, grant my earnest pray'r, and rise!
 You shall not kneel before the collier's daughter!
 I conquer, but reject the victor's prize,
 Obtained through such a torturing delusion.
 You would the laurel bind around my brows,
 The wreath I've gained is but a crown of thorns.
 For all the mortal agonies I suffered
 Were less severe than what I now endure.
 For even when, in humble garb arrayed,
 I left these walls, the victim of deception,
 Faith in my husband's love was my companion.
 Deception's past, but with it faith is fled!

PERCIVAL.

And have thine eyes no look of love for me?
 Thy mouth no tender smile for Percival?
 Love will retrieve the fault that Pride committed;
 Give to the winds the cares you 've overcome!
 The night is past, and cheerful beams the day.
 If mine the hand which reached thee sorrow's cup,
 Mine too can bring an anodyne of joy.
 Thy life shall be a wreath of fairest blossoms,

The deepest hidden longing of thy heart
 Will I convert to glad reality.
 Thy very dreams of joy I will fulfil,
 And satisfy thy scarce awakened wish,
 Till to desire and to possess be *one*.
 As Ocean girds this island with his waves,
 Shall ravishing delight encircle thee;
 And soon thou shalt forget, e'en how to wish.

GRISELDA

(in slow and half-broken accents.)

What thou dost promise is not thine to give!
 No more with pleasure shall this bosom heave,
 No more delight shall animate these eyes!
 Parade, and pow'r, and rank may life adorn,
 But love alone can give it happiness!
 Oh, Percival, thou'st gambled with my peace,
 This faithful heart was but a plaything to thee!
 Thou didst expose me as a mark for scorn,
 And gav'st me prey to aggravated woe.
 Thou fear'dst not I might sink beneath the task,
 Thy only fear was, they might conquer thee!
 May God forgive thee, e'en as I forgive!—
 But thou, my father, say, dost thou absolve me
 From the deep crime thou layedst to my charge?
 If, in my passion's criminal excess,
 The child of dust to Deity I raised,
 Are not the anguish of my cheated soul
 And these my tears sufficient expiation?
 Oh, may these arms in love's embrace enfold thee,

And dare I once again sink on that heart,
 Whence Love — no wish for vain parade — first tore me,
 No sinful longings, but affection's force.

CEDRIC.

Yes, my poor child, repose upon this heart, *heart*
 And healing drink from those rich springs of love,
 Which gush transparent from a father's heart.

GRISELDA.

The air's too heavy here — these halls oppress me! —
 Oh, take me hence, and let us seek the forest,
 And the still bosom of thy peaceful cot;
 There let this deeply stricken heart repose
 On nature's breast, and dream its woes away.
 At thy side let me rest, till we rejoin
 My sainted mother in the realms of light.

CEDRIC.

Come, and leave these with blushes to declare,
 Pain, but not insult could Griselda bear.

PERCIVAL.

My blood congeals within my heart, thy words
 Disturb the deep recesses of my soul;
 But still thy earnest looks deceive me not;
 Thou wouldst revenge with gloomy menaces
 My crime against thee, and with taunts embitter
 The proud triumphant feelings of this breast.
 Griselda, do it not! be reconciled!

The victor's wreath will all the brighter bloom,
If love and kindness are thy only vengeance.

GRISELDA.

Oh, Percival, mine eye seeks thee with tears,
My lips are trembling while I speak to thee,
Yet speak I must, for all must be decided —
All must be clear; with candour peace resides!
My heart was thine, but thou hast never known it,
It broke within thy grasp. Its hallowed glow
Was but a sport to thee, and thou couldst boast
Of all its constancy would sacrifice.

No, thou hast never loved me, and the one
Fond dream which made my happiness is fled!

My Paradise is fallen into ruin

And all around a joyless desert stares.

I could not wander hand in hand with thee,
And feel that heart was coldly turned from heart.

I could not, Percival. — My self respect —

My life — its closing scenes — all, all must rest

Upon the God-like image of my dreams —

Rest on *thy* image; let me then preserve it
Sparkling and bright, as now it fills my soul.

PERCIVAL.

What mean'st thou, woman? Speak! what is thy purpose?

GRISELDA.

Tho' born in forest gloom, I was not born

To be caprice's sport — the toy of humour —

And lost or won upon a single throw.

Thou'st never loved me, and, if now I could
 Without thy love consent to live with thee,
 I ne'er deserved the title of thy spouse.
 Oh, well thou knowest, Percival, on thee —
 On thee alone — my ev'ry hope depended. —
 Now to the humble cottage of my birth,
 Deep hid in shady forests, I return;
 And, as their whispers lulled my infancy,
 Their moans ere long shall sing my fun'ral dirge.

PERCIVAL.

What! thou wouldst leave me? — leave thy Percival?
 No, thou art mine! who dare deprive me of thee?
 I keep thee! who dare tear thee from my arms?
 Or who absolve thee from thy plighted troth?

GRISELDA

(with deep emotion.)

Thyself! — Our bands of love by thee were torn.
 The parting hour is come, and part we must!
 Grant me, I pray, the presence of my child
 For the few days which still remain to me —
 For well I know my latest hour draws near,
 And as the swallow southwards wings its flight,
 So struggles tow'rds its home my care-worn soul —
 Then mayst thou take him as my legacy,
 Instruct him in the ways of knightly honour,
 And compensate to him thy fault to me.
 But mayst thou long in life's bright freshness stand.
 A lofty stem, enwreathed with dazzling fame!

And should the conq'ring pow'r of blesséd love
 Hold thee again with other bonds enslaved,
 Oh, let no evil influence induce thee
 Again with snares to test its constancy! *
 For love will yield itself to love alone!

(She moves slowly away with Cedric.)

PERCIVAL

(will prevent her departure.)

Griselda, wouldst thou leave me? Never — never!
 Thou shalt not! — I *command* thee to remain!

ARTHUR

(motioning him back.)

Hold, Percival! — Henceforward *I* protect her;
 Thou'st forfeited all right to her possession,
 And now shalt place no bar on her departure.
 Love ev'ry struggle will for love endure,
 But is not called upon to yield obedience
 To the rough sole that treads it to the earth.
 Thy house is empty — fled thy happiness —
 Thy triumph's joyful arc for ever sunk!
 Now lonely dwell in these deserted halls,
 And, self upbraiding, live for self alone. **

(The King retires, followed by his own suite and Percival's vassals. Percival covers his face with his hands, and remains standing quite alone in the fore-ground of the stage, as the curtain falls.)

* Vid. Note 16. ** Vid. Note 17.

NOTES.

NOTES.

Note 1.

In the old Romance of "King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table," we read that "Merlin warned the King privily that Lancelot should love her, and she him again."

Sir Walter Scott in his "*Bridal of Triermain*" talks of

"Sir Lancelot who evermore

Look'd stol'n-wise on the Queen"—

and, in the notes to that Poem, cites from old Chronicles to the same effect. The Poet has therefore high authorities for the picture he has here drawn.

Note 2.

These monosyllabic answers of the fair Mercla have been rendered quite literally, although, in English, their repetition borders on the ridiculous. The effect is, I believe, different in German; still it appears to me that the piece would not suffer, were this dialogue entirely omitted; not only as being deficient in interest, and according but ill with

"The gentle Gawaine's courteous lore —"

(*Bridal of Triermain*)

but because its omission would in some degree relieve the stiffness, which is produced in this scene by the advance and retreat of so many successive couples.

Note 3.

Chaucer thus describes Griselda —

For though that evir vertuose was she,

She was eneresid in soche excellence

Of thewis¹ gode, sette in so high degre,

And so discrete and faire of eloquence,

And so benigne, and digne of reverence.

And couthe the pepli's hertis so embrace,

That eche her loved that lokid in her face.

¹ Qualifications. ² Could.

Note 4.

The word in the original is „Röbber,” and the occupation intended, that of Charcoal-burner, but as, in our language, we have no one word, expressive of this species of labour, admissible into poetry, I have ventured to borrow a term from a kindred employment, equally humble, and equally open to the sarcasms of Ginevra and her Courtiers.

Note 5.

In the original story of Boccaccio, and in Chaucer's metrical translation, Griselda's first-born was a daughter, but the consequent prospects of male issue are thus quaintly expressed by honest Geoffrey:

Not longé time aftir that this Grisilde
Was weddid, she a doughtir hath ybore,
Alle had she levir have bore a knave childe
Glad was the Marquis, and his folke therefore,
For though a maidin child came al before,
She may unto a knavé child attain
By likelyhode, sithin she n'is barraine.

This use of “knave” is interesting to the German student, both on account of the sense in which it is employed, now obsolete; and as exhibiting, in the two modes in which it is accented, the change from the German to the English pronunciation actually, we may say, in progress.

Note 6.

The prayer of the vassals according to Chaucer was, as follows:

Delivir us out of this besy drede
And take a wife, for the high Godd'is sake
For if it so befalle (as God forhede)
That through your dethe your lynage shold yslake¹
And that a straunge successour sholdin take
Your heritage, O wo were us on live!
Wherefore we pray you hastily to wive.

¹ quench.

Note 7.

The gallant troop, who accompanied the Knight in his first visit to Griselda, is thus described by the same poet:

This royalle Marquis richely was araid
 With Lordes and Ladies in his companie
 The whiche unto the feste werin yprayed,
 And of his retinue the Bachelerie
 With many'a sounne of sondrie melodie,
 And to the village, of which I you tolde
 In this araye the right waye hath yholde.

Note 8.

Original. Und sie sprach Ja!—I have endeavoured to soften down, in some degree, this abrupt assent on the part of Griselda to Percival's proposal, which, however much in accordance with the "truth and simplicity" of her character, is rather at variance with the retiring "modesty," with which the Poet would invest her. He has, however, here only followed the original story of Boccaccio where, in reply to the question: "Griselda, vuoi tu per tuo marito?" she answers: "Signor mio, si."

Note 9.

Original. Hüßflos, arm und nackt. Here too the Poet has followed Boccaccio literally, but as he afterwards departs from the original in assigning to Griselda "an apron and a woollen gown" by way of *trousseau*, a similar liberty has been taken in *clothing* the epithet.

Note 10.

I have not attempted to render literally the names of the various members of the Demon-tribe specified in the text, but have endeavoured to express the intention of the Poet by the use of generic terms. In translating the word „*Rebeld*," however, I have followed Sir Walter Scott who, in his Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft (Cap. IV), is of opinion, that the English "Goblin" and Scottish "Bogle" are immediately derived from it.

Note 11.

These very beautiful lines were probably suggested to the Poet by the argument, which Boccaccio puts into the mouth of Griselda, when pleading for permission to wear at least one garment, when driven forth by her Lord, but which will not admit of quotation. They also bear a close resemblance to the following passage quoted by Bulwer in "The Student", but from what author I know not — "Give me then back" (said one whom her Lord proposed to put away) "that which I brought you." And the man answered in his vulgar coarseness of soul: "Your fortune shall return to you." "I thought not of fortune" said the lady, "give me back my real wealth — give me back my beauty and my youth — give me back the virginity of soul — give me back the cheerful mind, and the heart that never has been disappointed."

Note 12.

Chaucer:

Her fadir that these tidinges herde anon
 Cursid the day and the time that nature
 Shopin him to ben a livis cature.

Note 13.

Chaucer:

The folke her folowed weping in her wey
 And fortune evir cursid as thei gone.

Note 14.

Original.

Und seckrãnt ganz vom Schwanken ihres Geistes,
 Ringt sie nach Stärke, klammert sich verzweifelt
 An eines Wortes Strohalm, doch nur tiefer
 Versinket sie im Wirbel der Gedanken.

It will be at once seen that a literal translation of the first figure contained in the above lines is quite inadmissible into our language, and I should much doubt its being consistent with the elegance of diction, for which the original is remarkable. It has at least the merit of novelty. The Poet seems determined

to call up "spirits from the vasty deep" to avenge the wrongs of Griselda on the Island Queen; for, by a second figure, we now find her struggling in the midst of those waves, whose first uneasy heavings had probably produced the *malady* specified above. This simile, too, I have been unable to render literally, and have therefore resolved it into its original elements. Our language is, unfortunately, not sufficiently malleable to allow of our forging such expressions, as the „Strohalm eines Wortes."

Note 15.

The exact translation of „Fastnacht" is preserved in the Scottish dialect — "Fastern's e'en," and there still exist in Scotland remnants of the rejoicings by which it was wont to be celebrated.

Note 16.

Chaucer:

But one thing I heseche and warne also
That ye ne prick with no soche turmenting
This tendir Maidin, as ye han do me—

Note 17.

Chaucer concludes his Translation with the following verses which he calls: "L' envoy de Chaucer à les Mariz de nostre tems;" but I doubt much whether the husbands of that or of any other period are much beholden to him for the rules which he deduces from the Tale, as proper to be followed by wives placed in circumstances similar to those of his Heroine.

Grisilde is dede, and eke her pacience,
And bothe at onis buried in Itaille,
For whiche I erie in opin audience
No weddid Man be so hardie to' assaile;
His wiv'is pacience, in hope to finde
Grisildis, for in certaine he shall faile.
O noble wivis, full of hie prudence!
Let no humillite your tonguis naile
Ne let no Clerke have cause ne diligence
To write of you a storie of mervaille,
As of Grisildis pacient and kinde,
Lest Chicheface! you swallow 'in her entraille.

¹ A sort of Hobgoblin.

Followeth Echo, that holdith no silence,
 But evir answereth at the Countretaile
 Beth not adassid¹ for your innocence,
 But sharpely take on you the governaile,
 Emprintith well this lesson on your mind,
 For common profite sith it may availe,

Ne drede them not, do them no reverence,
 For though thine husbonde armid be in maile.
 The arrowes of thy erabbid eloquence
 Shalle perece his herte, and eke his adventaile,
 In jelousie I rede The thou him binde,
 And ye shalle make him couche as doth a quaille.

If you be faire, there folke ben in presence
 Shewe thou thy visage, and thy apparaile;
 If thou be foule, be fre of thy dispence;²
 To get The frendis aye do thy travaile,
 Be aye as light of chere as lefe on linde,³
 And let him care, and wepe, and wring and waile.

Ye arehwivis⁴ stondith at your defence,
 Sith ye be strouge as is a grete camaile;
 Ne suffir not that men don you offence;
 Ye slendir wivis, feble in bataile,
 Beth eygre'⁵ as any Tiger is in Inde,
 Aye clappith as a mille, I you counsaile.

¹ be not abashed. ² expence. ³ lime-tree. ⁴ This word is thus given in Glossary: Strong, lusty Termagants. ⁵ sharp, cruel.

ORIGINAL BALLAD OF GRISELDA

as given in

The Reliques of Father Prout.

Griseledis.

Romance.

Escoutez icy jouvencelles,
 Ecoutez aussy damoiseaux,
 Vault mieux estre bone que belle,
 Vault mieux estre loyal que beau!
 Beauté passe, passe jeunesse,
 Bonté reste et gagne les coeurs;
 Avec douceur et gentillesse
 Espines se changent en fleurs.

Belle, mais pauvre et souffreteuse
 Vivoit jadis Griseledis;
 Alloit aux champs, estoit glaneuse
 Filoit beau lin, gardoit brebis;
 N'estoit fille de hault parage,
 N'avoit comté ny joyaux d'or,
 Mais avoit plus, car estait sage—
 Mieulx vault sagesse que trésor!

Un jour qu' aux champs estoit seulette
 Vinst à passer Sire Gaultier
 Las! sans chien estoit la pauvrette
 Sans page estoit le chevalier.

Griselda.

A Romaunt.

List to my ballad, for t'was made
 expresse,
 Damsels, for you;
 Better to be (beyond all loveliness)
 Loyall and true!
 Fadeth fair face, bright beauty
 blooms awhile,
 Soon to departe;
 Goodness abyde the aye; and gentle
 smile
 Gaineth the heart.

There lived a maiden, beautifull but
 poore,
 Gleaning the fields;
 Poor pittaunee shepherd's crook upon
 the moor,
 Or distaff yields!
 Yet tho' no castel hers had ever been,
 Jewells nor golde,
 Kindnesse she hadde and virtue;
 thyngs, I ween,
 Better fowr folde!

One day a cavalier, Sir Walter hight,
 Travelled that way;
 Nor dogge the sheperdesse, nor page
 the knight
 Hadde on that day.

Mais en ce siècle, ou l'innocence
 N'avoit à craindre aucun danger,
 Vertu veilloit, dormoit prudence,
 Beaux tems n'auriez pas du
 changer!

Tant que sommeille la bergère
 Beau sire eust le tems d'admirer,
 Mais dès qu'entr'ouvrist la paupière,
 Fust forcé de s'en amoureux;
 "Belle," dit-il "serez ma mie,
 Si voulez venir à ma cour?"
 "Nenny, seigneur, vous remercie,
 Honneur vault bien playsir
 d'amour?"

"Vertu, dit-il, passe noblesse!
 Serez ma femme dès ce jour—
 Serez dame, serez comtesse,
 Si me jurez, au nom d'amour,
 De m'obeir quand devrai même
 Bien durement, vous ordonner?
 "Sire, obeir à ce qu'on aime
 Est bien plus doux que comman-
 der."

Ne jura pour estre comtesse,
 Mais avoit vu le chevalier;
 A l'amour seul fist la promesse:
 Puis monta sur son destrier.

But in those times of innocence and
 truth,
 Virtue alone
 Kept vigil in our land; bright days
 in sooth,
 Where are ye gone!

Long on the maiden, as she slept,
 he gazed—
 Could gaze for months!
 But when awaking, two soft eyelids
 raised,
 Loved her at once!
 Fair one, a knight's true love canst
 thou despise,
 With golden store?
 "Sir Knight, true love I value, but I
 prize
 Honour far more."

"I too prize honour above high de-
 scent
 And all beside;
 Maiden, be mine! yes, if thou wilt
 consent,
 Be thou my bride!
 Swear but to do the bidding of thy
 liege
 Faithful and fond."
 "Tell not of oaths, Sir Knight; is not
 love's pledge
 A better bond?"

Not for his castel and his broad do-
 main
 Spoke so the maid,
 But that she loved the handsome
 knight— Love fain
 Would be obeyed.

N'avoit besoin de bienséances
 Le tems heureux des bonnes
 moeurs
 Fausses étoient les apparances,
 Nobles et vrayx estoient les
 cocurs!

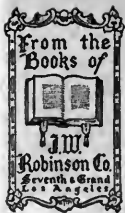
On the same charger with the knight
 she rodde,
 So passed along;
 Nor blame feared she, for then all
 hearts were good;
 None dreamed of wrong.

Tant chevauchèrent par la plaine
 Qu' arrivèrent à la cité
 Griseledis fust souveraine
 De ce riche et puissant comté;
 Chascun l'aima; sous son empire
 Chascun ressentit ses bienfaits:
 Beauté previent, douceur attire,
 Bonté gagne et fixe à jamais!

And they rodde on untill rose on the
 sight
 His castel towers;
 And there that maiden lived with that
 good knight
 In marriage bowers,
 Diffusing blessings among all who
 dwelt
 Within that vale:
 Goodness abideth aye — her smile
 is felt,
 Tho' beauty fail!

DRESDEN, PRINTED BY C. HEINRICH.





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